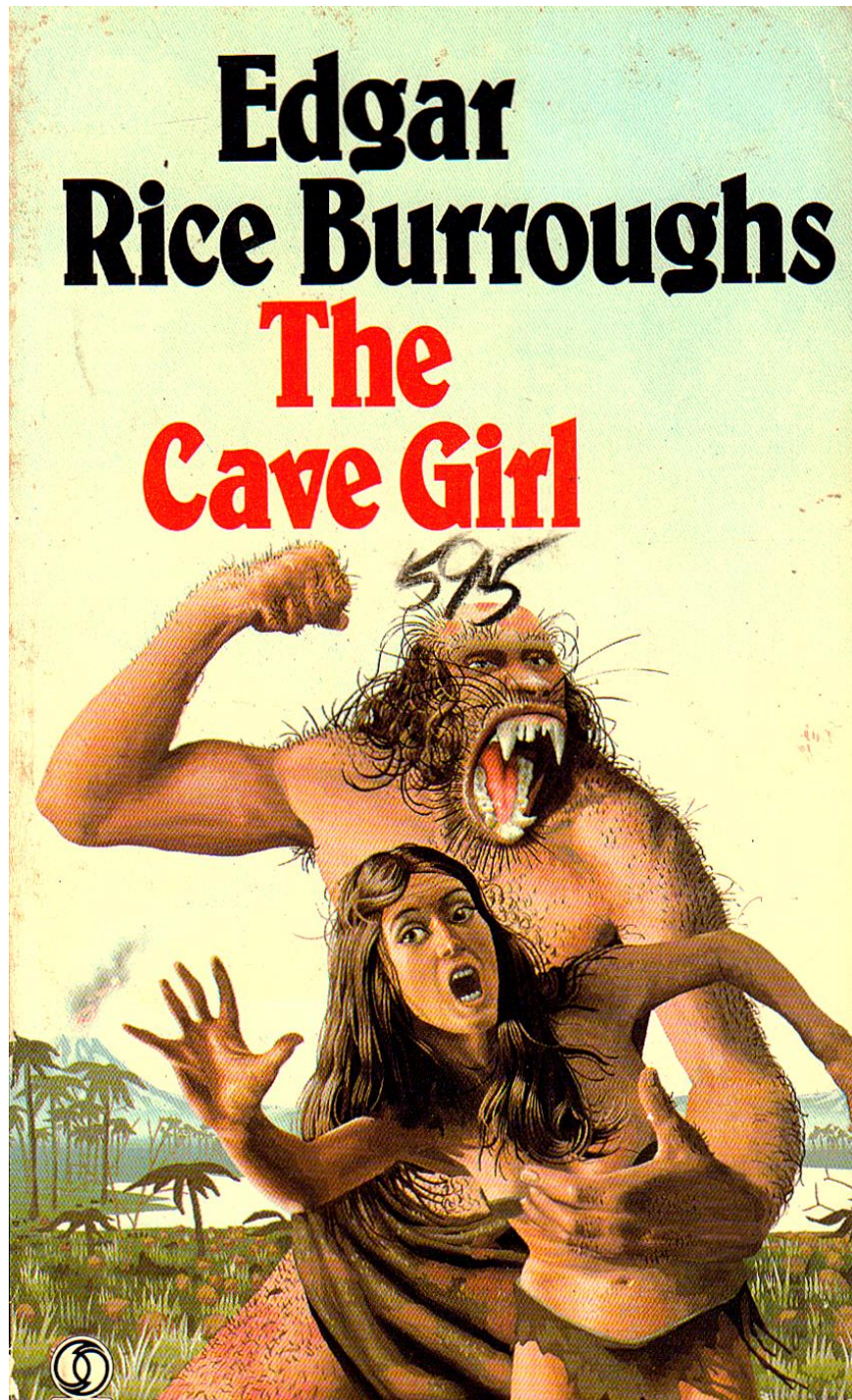


# BCSFAZINE

Clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association  
(Issue #540 – May, 2020)



**Dedicated to The Fellowship of The Greater BCSFA.**

BCSFazine is a Canadian non-profit Science Fiction online PDF Clubzine published by the British Columbia Science Fiction Association twelve times a year.

Distribution of this PDF clubzine is free, either by E-mail or via download.

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To submit articles, art work, or letters of comment, contact God-Editor R. Graeme Cameron at: < [the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com](mailto:the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com) >

Anyone interested in tons of back issues, please go to:

< <https://efanzines.com/BCSFA/> >

**CURRENT BCSFA EXECUTIVE**

Chair: Position open

Vice Chair: Position open.

Treasurer: Kathleen Moore.

Secretary: Barb Dryer.

BCSFazine Editor: R. Graeme Cameron.

Keeper of the FRED Book: Ryan Hawe.

FRED Organizer: Michael Bertrand.

VCON Ambassador for Life: Steve Forty.

***FRED Dinner*** – (FRED = “Forget Reality! Everybody Drink!”) A local Vancouver area meet-up founded circa 1986. Usually held every second Sunday, but **currently on hold due to the Coronavirus Pandemic**. Normally, about 6 to 10 BCSFAns tend to show up, plus any visiting fen interested in joining the lively conversation on wide-ranging topics. Convivial atmosphere. Will give details once FRED resumes.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE**

Midnight, May 31<sup>st</sup>. My simple layout design ensures it will get into the following month’s issue to be published on Jun 2<sup>nd</sup>. Guaranteed.

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## Cover Credit

**Cover** – A dramatic but uncredited piece of cover art. A Tandem book, published by Tandem Publishing Ltd in 1977, printed in Great Britain by Cox & Wyman Ltd, London. Written by Edgar Rice Burroughs, it was first published in America in 1913.

## EDITORIAL: THE GOD-EDITOR SPEAKS!

Welcome to my 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of *BCSFazine*. Last issue I laid out my optimistic, not to say Utopian, vision of *BCSFazine* as I perceive it. Response has been kind. I detect a certain amount of enthusiasm out there. I seem to have awakened some interest, but not yet a tsunami of participatory endorsement. Not a problem.

Ah, but last issue was 78 pages. This issue is smaller. Not only that, I've increased the spacing between lines to improve readability onscreen, so perhaps can be accused of trying to inflate the amount of material I have. Nope.

No one, least of all me, should have any false expectations. The size of the zine is going to fluctuate from month to month depending on the number of contributions and the amount of work that I get done.

I think of *BCSFazine* as akin to a simmering pot of stew. I stir it from time to time. Occasionally I add more ingredients when I remember what's in the fridge. Sometimes neighbours drop by with savoury ingredients of their own to add. At times I consult a cook book. Other times I throw in leftovers. Always I bear in mind I'm supposed to serve it out at the next family gathering. I know it will be tasty, meaty, and chunky. Whether it will be to everyone's taste or quite enough to go around remains to be seen. Not to worry. Once the dishes are cleaned I'll throw in some stock, get that simmering, and start thinking what sort of ingredients will soon be available. Point is, the pot is always on the burner, and something gets added in almost every day. Guaranteed to be a meal of some sort. Best I can do.

I'm not interested in *BCSFazine* being a statement of record. Got the internet for that. Obituaries, for instance. Too many damn pros and fens dying these days. A comprehensive monthly listing could go on for pages. Yes, every death is significant, but this is hardly apparent in a bare listing. I would prefer mini-articles in which the idiosyncrasies and individual quirks of the deceased are shown to the point of bringing their character and nature *to life* and not just a raw recital of facts which, if anything, helps bury them by reducing them to abstractions. I want obits which convey their personalities.

Another thing I'm not interested in is Olympian-level "objective" judging of this or that. This isn't a history journal for the academia crowd. I want personal opinions and personal bias openly exposed. I want the personal touch. I want the contributor speaking directly to the readership, not hidden behind some artificial filter of anonymous objectivity. This will make for great entertainment, which I define as one-on-one communication with the reader. I also define entertainment as something that grabs the reader's interest. If it is interesting, it is entertaining. At least, that's the theory behind my editorial policy. Hope it works.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

Send your letters of comment, submissions, ideas, etc. to:

< [the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com](mailto:the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com) >

## ODDS AND SODS ABOUT THIS ZINE

**Note** – All articles unless otherwise stated are by the God-Editor The Graeme. Opinions expressed in articles by contributors are entirely their own and do not represent the view of BCSFA, BCSFAzine, or the God-Editor.

**Nature of zine** – Pretty much anything to do with SF Fandom and whatever the fen are interested in. Or, to put it another way, whatever pops up in my fevered thoughts and the agitated minds of the contributors.

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## WHAT THE GOD-EDITOR WOULD LIKE TO PUBLISH

Basically, contributions by fen like you!

New to the ranks of contributors is Lisa Smedman, author, game designer, and teacher. Hoping she will contribute a regular column touching on writing, game design, game playing, or for that matter, anything else she wants to write about!

She joins regular contributors Michael Bertrand, Stan G. Hyde, Garth Spencer and Robert J. Sawyer. The list is building!

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## VOID BREATHER BOMBAST

**Uranus has Plasmoids!** – Constantly worried about the darn things. They bug many a planet, too. Jupiter and Saturn frequently expel them. Now Uranus has joined the fart club. Plasmoids are gobs of planetary atmosphere that escape into space whenever a planetary magnetic field shrinks away from the Solar Wind. Going over old data from the 1986 Voyager 2 probe, NASA scientists discovered Uranus had blown a gas bubble 22,000 times the size of the Earth. No wonder Uranus looks so blue. Must have been quite a strain!

**Gamma Ray Constellation named Godzilla!** – The Fermi Gamma Ray Space Telescope has been in orbit for 10 years mapping Gamma Ray sources, some 3,000 of them, including pulsars, black holes, and neutron stars. Mapped out, they form patterns like a visible star map, and NASA decided to name 21 of these patterns after things appropriate to their shape. One is named “Godzilla,” in part because of Godzilla’s “breath” which so closely resembles the gamma ray jets shooting out of certain interstellar objects. The other 20 constellations are named “Black Widow Spider, Fermi Bubbles, Colosseum, Eiffel Tower, Einstein, Fermi Satellite, Golden Gate, Hulk, The Little Prince, Mjolnir, Mount Fuji, Castle, Obelisk, Pharos, Radio Telescope, Saturn V Rocket, Schrödinger’s Cat, Starship Enterprise, Tardis and Vasa.” Ah the poetry and beauty of astronomical nomenclature!



***Milky Way Stripped Bare*** – Hard to get a shot of the centre of the Milky way (where there's a super-duper black hole) because there's all these stars between us and the centre of our galaxy which is 25,000 light years away. But a South African Radio Telescope called MeerKat (which is very cute, Meercats being so inquisitive and all) has managed a snap shot. Described as a "fiery mess," to my eyes the Galaxy centre looks like a flaming Sumo wrestler crouching, getting ready to spring, with arms extended out of which rise numerous tentacles. Scientists call them "unexplained filaments" but I know what they are! That critter is best left undisturbed, to my way of thinking. It's probably preparing for the match with the Andromeda galaxy which, if I remember correctly, is due to collide with the Milky Way at some point in the future. Our descendants, if any, will have ringside seats. Hmm, I wonder what the trophy awarded will be?

***Space Cadets Soon to Join Space Force*** – Space Commander General John W. "Jay" Raymond be a happy lad. On April 18<sup>th</sup> no less than 86 of the Cadets graduating from the U.S. Airforce Academy moved into the ranks of the newly formed U.S. Space Force which Raymond intends will be lean and agile and unencumbered by the baggage of Airforce culture. He envisions a total of no more than 15,000 members, many of them civilians, all of them digitally connected. Sounds like a gigantic think tank dedicated to developing space weapons, a tightly focused DARPA equivalent, rather than a Heinlein-style assault force of Space Marines. Allegedly the Russians tested an anti-satellite missile the other day and the Chinese already possess the ability to jam satellite communications. You can rest assured big bucks will be spent to come up with toys and tactics to counter them. But what I want to know is, has Raymond figured out yet where his office will be? And is he going with a desk fashioned out of Mahogany or one carved out of black jade? Ghu knows he can afford it.

***Alien Comets are weird!*** – Unlike our homegrown comets, born in the inner accretion disc, who tend to be homebodies. They exude (literally exude) sensible amounts of hydrogen cyanide like the decent comets they are. But that rude outsider, 21/Borisov, who ignores its parent and travels in a demented plunge through the void between the stars (and just where does it think it is going?) is spraying vast amounts of carbon monoxide in all directions. Scientists believe this indicates it was formed in the accretion disc of a red dwarf star where temperatures are colder and there is less material to work with. Because of that 21/Borisov obviously suffers from an inferiority complex and left the nest prematurely as a protest. Still not a decent way to treat your parent. Scientists also determined, when 21/Borisov zipped through our Solar System, that it's structure resembles an elongated turd. Now we know why. Symbolic of its character.

***Yet Another Zombie Satellite*** – British Columbian Scott Tilley found himself staying home quite a bit (for some reason) and decided to go looking for a zombie satellite, i.e. one no longer functioning but still occasionally transmitting and capable (in theory) of being reactivated. He's detected several before, including one NASA lost that he was able to reintroduce to them in 2018. This time he found Les-5, an

experimental UHF communication military satellite that was supposed to have been shutdown in 1972. Turns out its telemetry beacon is still operating. And you thought just humans produce zombies. Turns out Skynet has zombies of its own, too. I wonder if Skynet has nightmares about them in its subroutines?

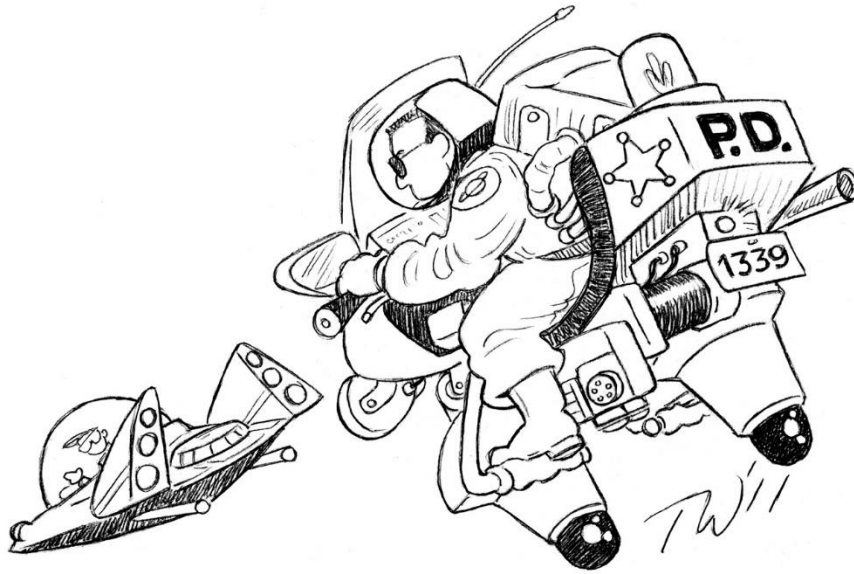
***Star Dust Smells Like Rotten Peanut Butter*** – Our Earth is 4.5 billion years old. Our sun is 4.6 billion years old. Star dust in the Murchison meteorite, which fell on Australia in 1969, is far older, as much as 7 billion years old. To put it another way, the dust has exceeded its shelf life, is past its prime. When fragments of the Murchison are pulverized into paste, it smells like rotten peanut butter. Naturally the scientists were offended, so they threw it into acid, which reduced to a collection of “pre-solar grains” that probably were even more rancid in odour. Fact is I’m made of star dust, and I eat a lot of peanut butter, so Ghu knows what kind of smell I would give off if reduced to paste. So I beg of you, for your own sake, never pulverize me. You’d probably regret doing so, even if it did seem like a cool party trick at the time.

***Soggy Old Mars*** – The Allan Hills meteorite was found in Antarctica in 1984. It’s a lump of stuff knocked off Mars in a game of cosmic billiards. A scientist’s dream, it was so contaminated by Earth stuff it took decades of government grants before it could finally produce a truly Martian bit of Mars. Turns out to contain organic material in the form of “orange-coloured carbonate minerals which precipitated from salty liquid water on Mars near-surface 4 billion years ago.” I think the term “orange-coloured” is a hint that the Allan Hills meteorite doesn’t smell anywhere near as bad as the Murchison meteorite. This factor will be of immense use in training dogs to sniff out different sorts of meteorites lying about. Good, solid, practical info, that.

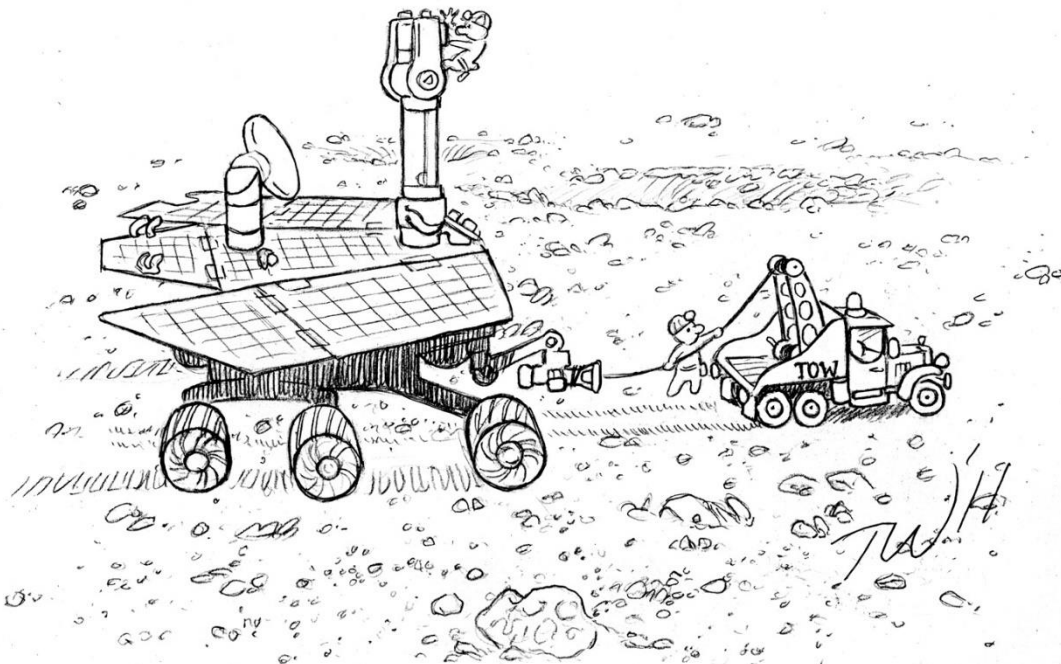
***Bagpipes in Space!*** – Bagpipes made by McCallum Bagpipes, of Kilmarnok, Scotland, became, in the hands of US astronaut Kjell Lindgren, the first bagpipes to be played in space. Sadly, the occasion was a memorial aboard the International Space Station by the 45<sup>th</sup> expedition crew for NASA Flight Surgeon Victor Hurst. Lindgren played the first few notes of Amazing Grace. Needless to say, this came to my attention via a posting from the Facebook group SCOTS USA. Certain Sassenach insist it be a NASA conspiracy to drive rampaging alien teenagers in their UFO hotrods away from the Earth. Och, aye, the noo. Mind, this happened in 2015. We bring you the latest news long after it happened. A wee combination of news and history.

***Mars Chopper given a name*** – 17-year-old Alabama student Vaneeza Rupani’s suggestion of “Ingenuity” was adopted by NASA for the tiny helicopter they plan to send to Mars sometime this summer. It’s a proof-of-concept vehicle. Designed to fly no longer than 90 seconds and no higher than 16.5 feet. That’s equivalent, in atmospheric density, to 100,000 feet on Earth. Air be a bit thin on Mars. Is this a hideously expensive secret test of a prototype high-altitude heli for Earth? No. Earth’s gravity is about 3 times greater than that of Mars. This tech wouldn’t work at attitude on Earth. So strictly for Mars. Only instrument on-board is a downward pointing camera to take pictures of its shadow as it flits about. Robot selfies are nothing new. The Rovers do it all the time. Bunch of narcissists if you ask me.

# TARAL WAYNE ART PORTFOLIO



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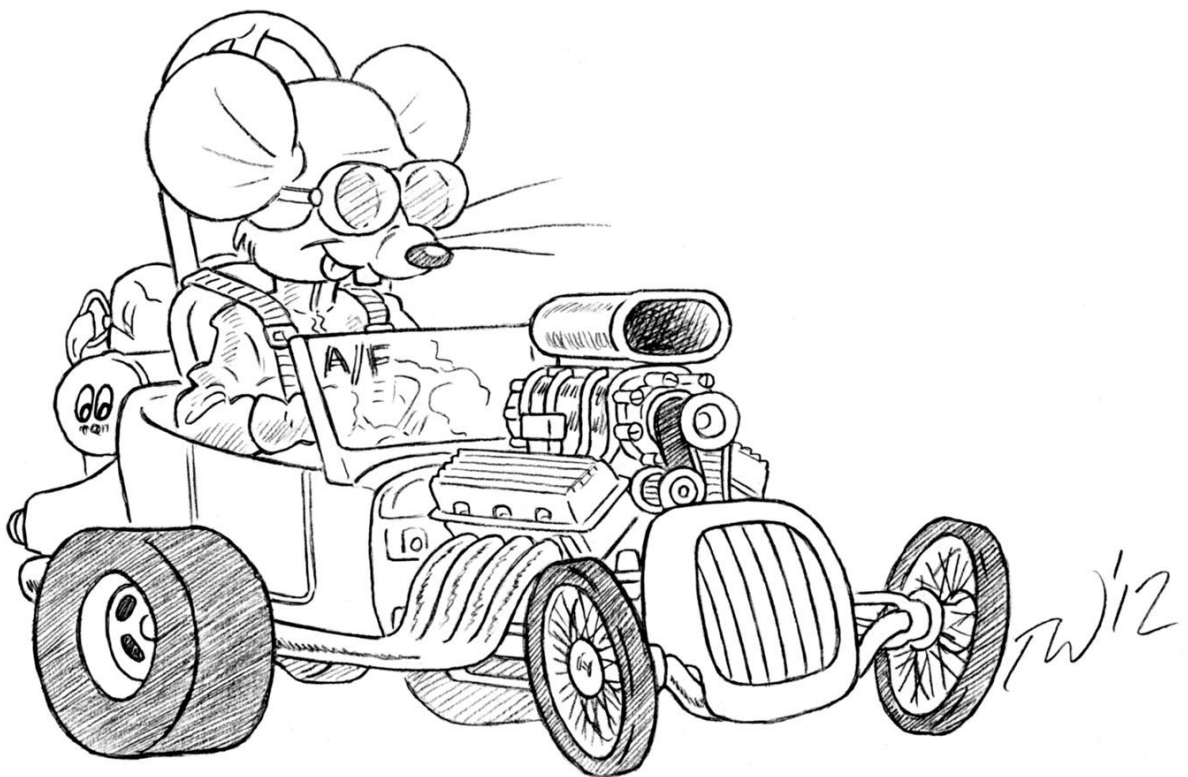


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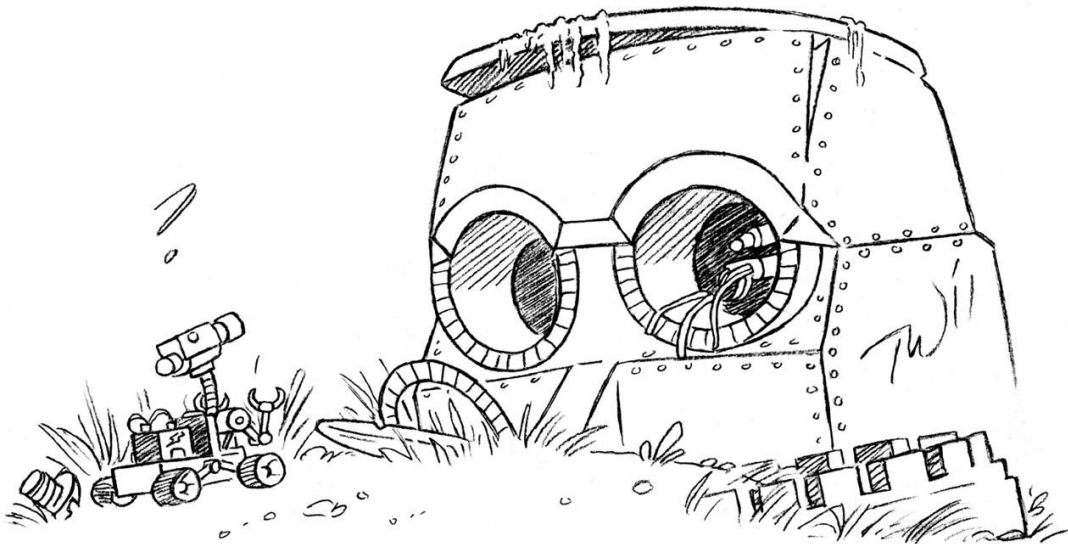


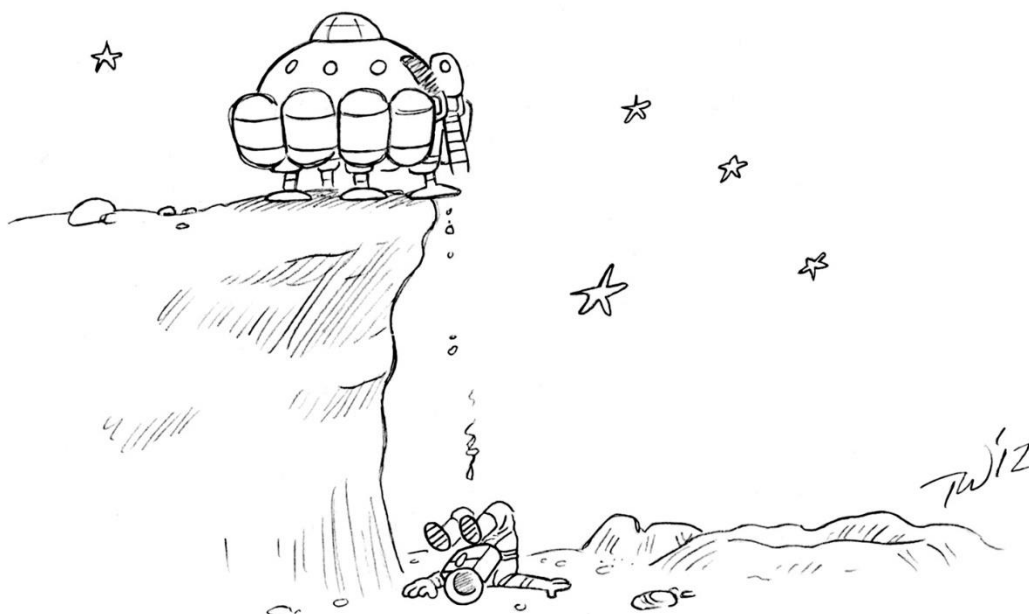
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# SPACE CADET



(Or: The Aging Old Fhart Nostalgic Time Waster Gazette) <sup>no.</sup> **15**

## LITERARY SHENANIGANS

***Your Personal Library Your Only Book Source*** – On April 3<sup>rd</sup> Robert J. Sawyer drew attention to a posting by Beth Meacham, a senior editor. Essentially the message is that the supply chain is breaking down and soon major publishers in the U.S. will not be able to publish. So, no new books.

Reasons include:

- Most paper suitable for publishing comes from China. Hasn't been any shipments for 3 months already. Paper from Canada has had a high tariff placed on it. Publishers are competing for dwindling supply of too-expensive paper.

- Only a couple of printing houses that can handle massive volumes of book printing exist in the U.S. One has shut down already.

- Book company warehouses are full. Bookstores are closed. No place to ship books to. So production of new books is ceasing because no chance of storing them or selling them.

The most significant paragraph reads:

“So the books that distributors and sellers ordered months ago are not being printed or shipped or sold. And because of that, they aren't making any money. And because of THAT, they are not ordering any books for months from now. Plus they aren't paying for the books they got from us last month and the month before. Cash flow has ground to a halt.”

Meacham predicts the effects of this publication glitch will last at least a year. Bad news for writers hoping to sell manuscripts to publishers. Bad news for readers hoping to buy the latest books by their favourite writers.

You really are stuck with those books you put aside “for a rainy day.”

***SFWA Trembling in its Boots?*** – Prolific writer Craig Martelle, author of more than 100 SF&F books, has founded IASFA, or the Independent Alliance of Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors. Apparently it's purpose is to serve the interests of writers who want to sell their works “For the simple reason that, in my opinion, professional organizations were hurting their members more than helping them ... I wanted an organization that was focused on helping science fiction and fantasy authors reach more fans. Period. Since one of those didn't exist, I started my own.”

An ex-Marine noted for his military SF and a self-proclaimed “blue collar author” I suspect he is not entirely in tune with the latest trends in the genre. In fact he is heavily involved in what is known as the “Sad Puppy Group” by their detractors. One of the Sad Puppy foremost influencers, in fact.

Not having delved deeply into the controversy, and possibly being excessively charitable given my own liberal nature (when I should be outraged, or something), my impression of the Sad Puppies is that they believe the following:

- Traditional markets have been hijacked by extreme left-wing nut bars.
- Readers aren't interested in LGBT rights or any rights because boring.



- All readers want is fun and escapism.
- Old-fashioned SF is the best. “Woke” SF sucks.

Well, personally, I love old-fashioned science fiction because that’s what I imprinted on as a kid. To this day I prefer “concept-driven conundrum SF” over, say, character-driven fiction. I’d rather read a story exploring the true nature of a newly discovered alien artifact than a story exploring the angst of an overly-sensitive individual constantly worried about social acceptance. In fact I can cheerfully dispense with plot and characterization if the “idea” is fascinating enough.

On the other hand, I know something of the history of satire and “progressive” thinking in the genre, I particularly admire originality and striking detail, am widely read outside the genre (am I the only one who found *Moby Dick* hilarious?), and believe in social progress and thus don’t mind it being reflected in modern literature.

To my way of thinking SF&F is incredibly diverse and that is one of its primary strengths. I hate to see love for the genre becoming divisive and politicised to the point where you are either with us or against us. Strikes me as a very American trend. The pre-eminent character of their current political divide is now spilling over into SF literature (as it evidently already has in gaming and comics). I find this sad.

I prefer to think of the genre as a marvellous orchard where I can cherry pick all manner of fruit in the hope that I will find them tasty and nourishing. Of course I will reject anything sour and unappetising, but I will nevertheless carry on sampling because it’s so much fun.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with any sub-genre within SF&F. A dull or poorly-written book can be found in any of them. So, too, exciting and invigorating works that are a pleasure to read. I hate to think long term trends could lead to censored or forbidden categories. I like the freedom to choose. I fear the opposite.

So, is the IASFA a bad thing? I doubt it will replace SFWA, as it has too narrow a focus. SFWA, warts and all, is useful to its members and, like them, has the capacity to change and evolve. Not sure IASFA can be as adaptable, but in sticking to its self-imposed mandate it may possibly be of some service to members whose primary interests are identical. Simply put, both will function in accordance with the level of support they receive from their members. That be the fundamental truth of the matter.

Thing is, I’ve already read one bit of commentary by a chap who belongs to both. Seems he was only interested in the advantages each offers to a writer like himself and didn’t much care about the politics implied. He felt he was simply being practical. Or, to put it another way, he was exploiting both organizations for his own needs. Perhaps it is precisely that sort of attitude on the part of individual authors that will prevent the industry from breaking up into angry factions at war with one another. I’d rather like to think so.

**Free Web Seminars for Writers** – Paula Johanson writes:

This week marks the start of a series of webinars jointly sponsored by Canadian Authors Association and SF Canada. These webinars were going to be free for members of either association to attend—and now, due to the impact of the Covid-19

pandemic on the writing community, anyone can attend these webinars without charge. If you have registered for a webinar, you can attend it when it is broadcast live, and also a link will be sent to you afterwards so that you can watch the recording at your leisure.

To register for any or all of these webinars, go to this link:

<https://canadianauthors.org/national/programs-and-services/webinars/>

There are two more webinars to come after these first four, and when their dates are set, we'll share the news.

Please share the link for this webinar series with anyone you think may be interested, particularly any writer who is feeling isolated. I'm sure that any writer, no matter what their interests or experience, will want to attend at least one of these webinars. There are some fascinating topics being presented by experienced Canadian writers, including five of SF Canada's own: Simon Rose, Mark Leslie Lefebvre, Ron Friedman, Melissa Yi and Krista D. Ball, as well as CAA author Lynn Duncan who starts the series. Thanks to Matthew Bin for all his work facilitating the webinar series, as a member of both SF Canada and CAA.

**Note:** The first webinar has already taken place. Here are the next three scheduled. Two more will be added later.

*Writing for Children and Young Adults* – Simon Rose – Wednesday, May 13 – 7:00 to 8:30 PM (ET).

Examine the art of writing for children and young adults. Explore research, planning, pacing your story, developing characters, connecting with the reader, choosing settings, the role of adults in children's stories, and more.

After attending this session, participants will be able to understand the fundamentals of writing for children and young adults, how to turn your ideas into stories, understand the need for outlines, planning, editing, and revision, understand the importance of research, create great beginnings and pace your story, and be able to research ways in which to submit your work to publishers.

*Leveraging Your IP and Maximising Income in a Digital Age* – Mark Leslie Lefebvre – Wednesday, May 27 – 7:00 to 8:30 PM (ET).

Writers have never had more options than ever in the history of publishing. The digital marketplace has expanded opportunities for print books, eBooks, and audiobooks. But navigating the vast oceans of opportunity, determining what path is best for each particular writing project, and avoiding the treacherous seas, uncharted waters, and the industry sharks that swim these waters preying on the hopes and dreams of authors can be tricky.

This overview of the platforms, the players, and the alternatives available for writers to be able to maximize their readership and their opportunities for multiple streams of revenue will provide you with the background you need to keep from drowning and to chart your own unique course as an author.

*Characterization and Character-Driven Conflicts* – Ron S. Friedman – Wednesday, July 15 – 7:00 to 8:30 PM (ET).

Conflicts have stood at the heart of storytelling since the dawn of Humankind. Learn how the latest discoveries in brain science and human behaviour can help you grow three dimensional characters motivated by different world views in complex societies that confront each other in a believable manner. Eliminate the BS factor. Make your conflicts shine.

During this webinar, you will learn a simple psychological model that can help you as a writer to understand human behaviour and utilize this model in your writing to create reliable characters that readers can relate to and understand their motives.

You will also learn a few philosophical worldviews and how to combine those views with the above model to spark believable character driven conflicts.

Then we will analyze several characters from known stories and see how this model applies.

**Note:** Two more webinars are being finalized now as part of this series:

- How to Build Worlds without Boring Your Reader, with Melissa Yuan-Innes
- Going Solo: Self-Publishing Tips and Tricks for Those First Starting Out, with Krista Ball

Also, previous webinars have been recorded that you can watch for free!

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## MAGAZINES DRENCHED IN MAPLE SYRUP (Canadian Pro-zines Worth Reading)

### **Unnerving Magazine issue #12**

In my Amazing Stories (online) Magazine column of April 24<sup>th</sup> I review every story and article in this issue. To give you an idea of what Unnerving is like I give you my review of the first story.

**Here There be Spiders** – by Graham Watkins

*Premise:*

Tony and Carol are spelunkers keen to explore caves. Carol descended a shaft which suddenly narrowed at the bottom trapping her when she foolishly tried to wiggle through. Tony is unable to pull her out. Along comes another, more experienced spelunker, who knows where the entrance to the vast cavern opening beneath her is. Ideally, he should go in and push her up so Tony can haul her out. Trouble is the newcomer also knows what lives in the cavern.

*Review:*

The unnamed rescuer happens to be an arachnophobe. Normally, this isn't much of a problem because the pickings for cave spiders are slim, which tends to keep the numbers down. This particular pit, however, attracts any number of small critters which tend to slide and fall into the cavern below, which in turn attracts assorted bugs, providing food not just for typical cave spiders but also species found on the surface. I have no idea if this is credible, but it doesn't matter. Easily acceptable premise for the sake of the story.

Given that most people dislike spiders (which are actually very useful beasts), this story offers ample opportunity to creep the heck out of the reader. One very quickly feels concern for both Carol and her would-be rescuer. Especially since Watkins evokes the true-life fate of Floyd Collins, a spelunker trapped in a similar situation in 1925. For a while, people could get to him, including a reporter who interviewed him and won a Pulitzer prize for his news coverage, but rock falls put an end to supplying food and water, though voice communication remained possible. It took Floyd over two weeks to die, just three days before the rescue shaft being dug reached his body. Most of this is not described in the story, but to those familiar with his fate the mere mention of him sends shivers down your spine.

This is a very shivery story. Watkins adds layer upon layer of fear and anticipatory dread as the hero works his way towards Carol. The detailed description of the environs of the cave, and its numerous inhabitants, only add to the horror. Towards the end the reader is rooting for the rescuer to turn tail and run, never mind the damsel in distress. A dragon is one thing, but a cave full of spiders? Forget it. The actual ending is psychologically valid and just as frightening as the story leading up to it.

I once was led over a mile through a cave in Yucatan. Being a tourist site, it was reasonably well lit, and I didn't see any evidence of spiders. However, do I aspire to be a spelunker exploring a newly-discovered cave for the first time? Having read this story, I would say absolutely not! I'll wait for the National Geographic special, thank you very much. This be one darn creepy story.

See my full review < [Review of Unnerving issue #12](#) >

Go to Unnerving Magazine website < <https://www.unnervingmagazine.com/> >

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## BOOKS TO BURDEN YOUR MIND

### **Unknown Burroughs:**

#### **Never Mind John Carter of Mars, What About the Mucker?**

(Previously published in Amazing Stories (online) Magazine Jan 17, 2014)

In my opinion, John Carter the movie came out too late, in the sense that many of Burroughs biggest fans were already dead. People like Carl Sagan, for instance, who credited the Barsoom series as inspiration for pursuing a career in astronomy. Burroughs generational influence is gone, except for old gits like me. And even I came late, being thrilled by the 1960's reprint paperback explosion of Burroughs books to do with Mars, Venus, Pellucidar and Tarzan. Burroughs' last gasp, really. How many young fans today have read any of those books, I wonder? Not many.

Burroughs was a pulp fiction writer, and like most such, a formulaic writer, albeit a brilliant one. Brilliant at being formulaic that is. He knew he wasn't a *real* writer, like, say, Hemingway, whom he avoided being introduced to on one memorable occasion. (It's entirely possible "Papa" would have been delighted to meet him. Both were fantasists, each in their own way.) But he was darn proud of what he accomplished. Not many writers ever became both wealthy *and* a household name. Darn proud. And maybe a little bored. I mean, come on, how many Tarzan novels could he write? Every now and then he tried something different. Thought I'd mention a few of them.

### ***The Lost Continent***

This is one of Burroughs rare forays into future history SF. The hero, Jefferson Turck, serves in the great Pan-American Navy (the entire hemisphere united) in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. The rest of the world is under quarantine to enable the West to avoid foreign entanglements, namely the World War smiting the Eastern Hemisphere. The last foreign ship had been sighted in 1972. Nothing since. At least, no sightings publicly reported.

Jeff serves aboard the Aero-submarine "Coldwater," one of "the first air and under-water craft which have since been so greatly improved since its launching." One hopes with the addition of a capacity to float ON the surface and not just above and below. A pesky storm shows up, and survival chances are not improved by Jeff turning the ship "broadside to the wind." The engines break down. The storm abates.

Jeff decides to go fishing from a small boat while the engines are repaired. He's somewhat miffed when the Coldwater suddenly takes to the air and abandons him. Seems the crew are not fond of his command skills. Nothing for it but to sail east to the nearest land, "the forgotten lands of the Eastern Hemisphere." Oddly enough, the boat has a detailed map of the forgotten English Channel on board. Very handy that.

"It has been two hundred years," I told him, "since a Pan-American visited England."

"England?" he asked. "What is England?"

"Why, this is part of England!" I exclaimed.

"This is Grubitten," he assured me. "I know nothing about England, and I have lived here all my life."

It was not till long after that the derivation of Grubitten occurred to me. Unquestionably it is a corruption of Great Britain ..."

Ah, Burroughs trademark heady futurism. You'll be pleased to know the novel ends with Pan-America and a revived Chinese Empire happily dividing the world into spheres of influence.

### ***The Cave Girl***

Not quite Tarzan, Waldo Emerson Smith-Jones, a man of vast intellect and puny fighting skills, is shipwrecked on a Pacific island inhabited by Ape-men, with

emphasis on the “Ape.” Fortunately the women are comely. Waldo not exactly stoic in nature.

“While he was able to control his tears for a moment he took the opportunity to scan the deepening shadows once more.

The first glance brought a piercing shriek from his white lips.

The thing was there!

The young man did not fall grovelling to the sand this time – instead, he stood staring with protruding eyes at the vague form, while shriek after shriek broke from his grinning lips.”

Not even Hemingway could write like this. Burroughs definitely a master of the pulp form. Entirely different league if you ask me. Burroughs approach to gender differences a trifle different from Hemingway too.

“As his eyes wandered along the lines of her young body his Puritanical training brought a hot flush of embarrassment to his face ... It was frightful—what would his mother say when she heard of it?

... she with only a scanty garment of skin above her waist—a garment which reached scarcely below her knees at any point, and at others terminated far above?”

I do believe Burroughs is being a trifle risqué here. Having a lot of fun spoofing the traditional pulp manly virtues actually. Never fear. Waldo rescues both his reputation and the girl despite the best efforts of numerous skulking, hairy brutes.

### ***The War Chief***

“The son of a white man becomes an Apache Warrior.”

This is actually pretty cool. Burroughs genuinely knew quite a bit about the Apaches. As he once wrote: “After leaving Orchard Lake (Michigan Military Academy), I enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry and was sent to Fort Grant, Arizona, where I chased Apaches, but never caught up with them.” Consequently he put more effort into this book than most. For instance, the opening paragraph:

“Naked but for a G-string, rough sandals, a bit of hide and a buffalo headdress, a savage warrior leaped and danced to the beating of drums. Encircling fires, woman-tended, sent up curling tongues of flame, lighting, fitfully, sweat-glistening shoulders, naked arms and legs.”

Big deal you say? Standard “red Indian” description in the pulps?

But it isn’t. Burroughs is opening with a depiction of a prehistoric Caledonian ancestor of the protagonist, Andy MacDuff. Making a point you see. Western civilization had its origins in a culture identical to that of the much derided “injuns,” a culture more virile than that of pampered modern man, the unspoken implication being that Native American culture was in some ways superior to that of civilized folk. Burroughs could be quite subversive of “the natural order” at times.

Perhaps in a laughable manner to modern sophisticates, Burroughs insisted on portraying the “savages” as possessing an inherent grace and dignity of their own, as per example:



“Dusk deepened into a moonless night canopied by a star-shot heaven so clear and close that the stars seemed friends that one might reach out and touch. The Apaches, lovers of Nature, sensed beauties that many a dull frontier clod of the usurping superior race lacked the soul to see. Even on the verge of battle they felt and acknowledged the wonders and beauties of the night, casting hoddentin to the heavens and the winds as they prayed to their amulets and phylacterics.”

I’m tempted to say I had no idea the Apaches were Jewish, but I think here Burroughs is employing the secondary meaning of “amulet or charm” which makes the end of the sentence a bit redundant but, hey, full marks for trying.

As for “hoddentin,” Burroughs is showing off his specialist knowledge acquired from personal experience. It is the sticky pollen of Cattail rushes which the Apaches to this day consider sacred and utilize in many ceremonies. Further, it was hoddentin the mythic White Painted Woman scattered across the sky to create the Milky Way. Burroughs doesn’t explain the meaning in the book. I think he employed the term because it sounds exotic and would hint at hidden mystery in Apache beliefs, but also as a hidden sign to scholars that he knew what he was writing about.

Anyway, I think Burroughs really was trying, because of his respect for the Apaches, to write a “serious” novel, taking extra care with his description which is vivid and far better than his usual effort. A labour of love, I think.

### ***I am a Barbarian***

This really is fascinating. Some critics consider this Burroughs’ best work. Certainly he made significant efforts to research like crazy, listing thirteen books he consulted, including *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius and *Caesar’s Commentaries*, along with assorted tomes with titles like *The Tragedy of the Caesars*, *Travel Among the Ancient Romans*, and *The Private Life of the Romans*.

All about the Roman Emperor Caligula you see, and the people he interacted with like Tiberius, Germanicus, Sejanus, and Claudius, not to mention his lovely sisters.

Caligula the Barbarian?

No, silly. The main character is Britannicus Caligulae Servus, the grandson of Cingetorix, the King of Kent, but despite his illustrious ancestor winds up a four-year-old slave assigned to a four-year-old *Little Boots* as Caligula was called. In fact that’s what “Caligula” means, a nickname assigned by Roman soldiers who loved the fact he ran around in a miniature soldier’s uniform as a kid. Anyway, the lucky slave gets to grow up as Caligula’s personal servant.

Quite a brilliant concept. Enables a fly-on-the-wall approach to all the imperial shenanigans right up to the popular Emperor’s Assassination.

“This Agrippina was a bitch.”

I think it is safe to say this book wasn’t aimed at his usual target audience of brass-bra enthusiasts. Possibly this book was even more heartfelt and serious as *The War Chief*, though not on as personal a level mind you. I think Burroughs was trying

for a *respectable* historical novel, one that would elevate his reputation. The occasional use of adult language supports this interpretation.

In any case the book is a hoot. I mean, come on, how could you possibly write a boring novel about Caligula? You can't. A character of characters was *Little Boots*. Burroughs has a lot of fun with him.

One problem Burroughs faced, not normally a huge problem in his dozens of fantasy books, was how to integrate his research as smoothly as possible without risking an info dump. Every writer faces this problem sooner or later. Here is an example of how Burroughs handled it, describing the eleven-year-old slave being given a tour of Rome by another slave:

"Never been here before, sonny?" he asked.

"Never. It's Wonderful."

"Well, that building on your left," he said "is the Theatre of Marcellus. Augustus built it about forty years ago in memory of his nephew who had died about ten years before, when he was twenty years old."

"It is beautiful," I said. "Augustus must have been very fond of him. Did you know him, Tibur?"

Tibur swore a great oath, but he laughed. "How old do you think I am, to have known a fellow who died fifty years ago?"

This is good, because defines Rome as an evolving organism rather than a mere place. To kids in Caligula's time the civil wars of the early Augustan period were no more relevant than WW II is to modern kids. Strictly granddad stuff. A lot has changed in the meantime, and continues to change as both Servus and Caligula get older. Suffice to say that Servus begins to fear for his life, but manages to do Caligula one last favour.

If the book has a fault it reads very much like a biography of Caligula without much insight into what drove him apart from paranoia, lust for power, jealousy, greed and insanity. Aside from that Burroughs barely touches on motivation ...

If you love ancient history, or palace intrigue, this is a ripping good yarn. Good job, Burroughs!

### ***The Mucker***

According to the preface by Kevin B. Hancer, "*The Mucker* was the tenth story written by Edgar Rice Burroughs and it contained elements of every kind of popular action fiction. It had street gang crime, sea life, piracy, a lost race, a desert island, romance, boxing, courtroom drama, hobo wanderlust, revolution and western adventure. The author felt that this would be his most popular novel, but it failed to catch on ..."

A novel on any one of these themes, or two or three, might have done well, but it's hard to do justice to any of them when there are so many.

Or maybe the problem lay with the main character, Billy Byrne, the Mucker, which I gather is street slang for a mindless thug. He's a little bit too much of a tough guy, hard to identify with. Consider Burroughs' description of him:

"Billy was a mucker, a hoodlum, a gangster, a thug, a tough. When he fought, his methods would have brought a flush of shame to the face of his Satanic Majesty. He had hit oftener from behind than from before. He had always taken every advantage of size and weight and numbers that he could call to his assistance. He was an insulter of girls and women. He was a bar-room brawler, and a saloon-corner loafer. He was all that was dirty, and mean, and contemptible ..."

Such people exist, but I wouldn't call them role models, the very opposite of the gallant and courtly John Carter of Mars.

Even worse, Billy talks like this: "Fer half a cent I'd soak youse a wallop to de solar plexus dat would put youse to sleep fer de long count..."

Full marks for guts, but definitely a failed experiment. And that's the thing, Burroughs DID experiment whenever moved to do so. Not limited to his formulaic tendencies by any means.

### ***The Girl From Hollywood***

Never read it, but I sure would like to. I've heard it is one of his worst novels, but it does feature a kind of self-parody of Burroughs as Colonel Custer Pennington and is probably worth reading for that reason alone.

And the above are just SOME of the non-canon works by Burroughs. Seek them out. Great fun.

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## THE RANDOMNESS OF STORYTELLING

*By Lisa Smedman*

If I were to say to you, "Tell me a story," your first question would naturally be, "About what?"

Like a painter given a white canvas and told to create, you'd have to think long and hard about where to start. Who are the characters? Where is the story set? What happens? What is the theme—what is this story all about?

Story prompts can be a great starting point—the lines within which you paint. But unlike a paint-by-number painting, story prompts can be altered as the writer wishes. A little bend here, an erased line there—and oh, the choice of colours to go between those lines!

I'm a really big fan of the challenge of forcing yourself to use those lines, to come up with a story that fits the prompts. That can lead the writer down some amazing rabbit holes of research.

Story prompts can be found everywhere on the internet. Here's one example:  
< <https://writingexercises.co.uk/plotgenerator.php>. >

But I prefer a more hands-on approach. As a gamer, I like to roll some dice, flip some cards. And, whenever possible, to play games that create stories.

There are some great storytelling games on the market, the gameplay of which consists of players ad-libbing a tale to the play of a card.

**Once upon a time** is one such game, a competitive endeavour in which the goal is to get rid of the hand of cards you've been dealt. Each time you play a card, you must ad-lib a slice of story the players are collaboratively creating. Ultimately, you must work the story around to the ending card you've been dealt, which wraps up the tale.

**Aye, Dark Overlord** is another example of card-based, ad-lib storytelling. In this game, one player is the Overlord, and the others are minions who play cards to weave a tale of why the quest they were sent on went so terribly wrong, horribly, wrong. It's a game of last storyteller standing, as the Overlord yells, "You have displeased me!" and knocks yet another quivering minion out of the running.

Then there's **Dungeons and Dragons** which I've played (an professionally designed adventures for) since the early 1980s. D&D is a game where the setting, characters and possible plots are laid out in advance: lines the players colour within. It's a game in which literally anything the players imagine can happen—assuming the rules permit it.

Sometimes, of course, the game master of a tabletop RPG has to make up an adventure on the fly. With that in mind, Tracy Hickman created the ultimate tabletop gaming advice book, *XDM: X-Treme Dungeon Mastery*.

(Hickman, by the way, was co-author of the very first gaming tie-in novel, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. Published in 1984, the novel was based on the characters his D&D group played in a campaign setting of his own creation. Reading it, you can almost hear the dice being rolled.)

XDM is a great read, full of tips and theatrical tricks—but the takeaway here is its random scenario generator.

Using dice rolls and a series of tables, the game master creates a sentence that is the starting point for an adventure. For each blank in the sentence, the appropriate table is rolled on, randomly generating a story subject, location, object, verb—and the adjectives that describe them.

For example, the first "storytelling" sentence reads "A [2] [1] is [6]ing a [1 or 3] with a [4] [5] in a/the [4] [3]." Which could produce: "A lying imp is disenchanting a graveyard with a shadowy coffin in an immoral forest."

Yeah, I could do something with that.

But those are games—collaborative ventures—and I'm here to talk about the solo pursuit of writing a story.

A while back, I discovered a story prompt system that I really enjoy, for several reasons. First, because it uses a deck of cards. Second, because it was created in 1936, and thus includes some wonderfully archaic (and often not politically correct)

language. Third, because the system uses an innovative mechanic to “deal” the cards. And fourth, because it was aimed at creating pulp fiction stories, a genre I particularly enjoy.

It’s called ***Deal a Plot: The Plot Stimulator***, and a pdf of the cards (and box) is available here, in case you want to create your own deck: < [Deal a plot](#) >

There are 36 cards in the deck, which can be used to generate a plot problem, complication, climax, setting, and male and female characters (plus adjectives that describe them). To use the cards, you cut the deck, laying it open like two pages of a book. The back of each card contains a number from 1 to 6, which produces the “dice roll” that gives you the result on the face-up card.

For example, a setting card might be number 2, “Lake.” Or, if you wanted a second choice, reverse the card, and the setting turns out to be “Dive” (as in disreputable establishment).

As mentioned, the terminology is straight out of 1930s pulp fiction. What, for example, is a “Nautch Girl” or a “Gamin.?” I’ll leave that to you to google; the answers can be fascinating—and, as previously mentioned, lead to endless research rabbit holes.

I’ve used the *Deal a Plot* cards to create three stories, so far. In the spirit of the cards, they’re all heavily influenced by *Weird Tales* and other pulp fiction of the 1930s, and are all (so far) set in whatever period of history my research led me to. Each involves a hefty dose of speculative fiction, and a fun twist.

If you’d like to check the stories out, I’ve posted them to my website: < [Lisa Smedman](#) >.

Do you know of any other systems for randomly generating storylines? Please share them with me, in the comments at my site. And have fun writing!

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## RANDOM MUSINGS

*By Robert J. Sawyer*

### Three Screeds on Classic Science-Fiction TV

#### 1. The Six Million Dollar Man had only one great season.

*The Six Million Dollar Man* really hit its stride in its second season.

The original three films are worth seeing, and there are maybe three or four good episodes in the short first season (which had 13 episodes):

- Population Zero
- The Rescue of Athena One
- Burning Bright
- The Coward

But season two gives us:

- Pilot Error
- The Pal-Mir Escort
- The Seven Million Dollar Man
- Straight on 'Til Morning
- The Deadly Replay
- Stranger in Broken Fork
- Lost Love
- The Last Kamikaze
- The E.S.P. Spy
- The Bionic Woman Part I
- The Bionic Woman Part II
- Outrage in Balinderry

That's 12 great episodes out of 22. They might not have been YOUR favorites as a kid, but watch these ones today and you'll see just how dramatic and mature they were.

Season 3 started strongly, too:

- The Return of the Bionic Woman Part I
- The Return of the Bionic Woman Part II
- The Price of Liberty

And then — *bam!* — the show jumps the shark with the utterly unwatchable “The Song and Dance Spy” with Sonny Bono as the guest star, after which came all the stupid one-idea episodes: Steve as a quarterback, Steve as a lumberjack, Steve as a cop, and, yes, all the Bigfoot episodes. It went overnight from being a serious drama to a kid's show — a true jumping of the shark.

## **2. Fred Freiberger was a good producer.**

Fred Freiberger was the producer of the unfairly maligned third and final season of the original *Star Trek*. In addition, he produced the second and final season of *Space: 1999* and the fifth and final season of *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

I know a lot of Star Trek fans have been indoctrinated by vested-interest parties (individuals who outlived him Freiberger by decades but resented not getting much work from him) to say that he was a showkilling monster, but I just can't agree — and neither does Nichelle Nichols, who played Uhura.

She wrote in her biography *Beyond Uhura* that Freiberger's efforts were hampered by a reduced overall budget which was eaten into by increased actor salaries. The result? “You saw fewer outdoor location shots, for example. Top writers, top guest stars, top anything you needed was harder to come by. Thus, *Star Trek's* demise became a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I can assure you, that is exactly as it was meant to be ... In the third season new producer Fred Freiberger did everything he could to shore up the show. I know that some fans hold him responsible for the show's decline, but that is not fair. *Star Trek* was in a disintegrating orbit before Fred came aboard. That we were able to do even what we did is a miracle and a credit to



him. One day Fred and I had an exchange, and he snapped at me. Even then, though, I knew he wasn't angry with me but with his unenviable situation. He was a producer who had nothing to produce with."

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Sure, The Original Series had third-season turkeys. It also had some of the very best (way better than the worst of first or second season), including "The Enterprise Incident," "Is There In Truth No Beauty?," "The Tholian Web," "The Savage Curtain," "All Our Yesterdays," "Spectre of the Gun," etc. etc., all produced on a shoestring by Freiburger. And he did gutsy things, such as the first Trek interracial kiss, the blatant allegory of "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield," and my all-time favorite episode, "Requiem for Methuselah."

As for *Space: 1999*, that they got a second season *at all* was contingent on a retooling of the downbeat, deadly-serious-acting combined with ludicrous plots that marred the first season (and led to Barry Morse leaving, which had nothing to do with Freiburger).

And, as I observed above, as for *The Six Million Dollar Man*, the show was crap by early season 3, irredeemable by season 4, and it wasn't until season 5 that Freiburger came in.

### **3. A Captain Sulu series never would have flown.**

There's a recent article at [screenrant.com](http://screenrant.com) that says there should have been a Captain Sulu spin-off series, arguing George Takei's reprising the character in the episode "Flashback" on *Star Trek: Voyager* proved that was true. As Dr. McCoy once said, "Poppycock."

George Takei showed a very limited range in his entire acting career, and there was nothing in that *Voyager* episode to convince executives that he could carry a series on his own. That's quite conceivably not his fault; the parts offered Asian actors in the US tended to be quite limited.

Still, imagine him doing the “Risk is our business” speech, or the “I give, she takes,” or the “She’s human! Down to the last blood cell, she’s human!”, or the “No, I won’t kill him — do you hear?” or the “A very old and lonely man ... and a young and lonely man,” or the “In every revolution, there’s one man with a vision,” or the “All I ask is a tall ship,” or any of the other powerful bits Shatner did on *The Original Series*?

Maybe you *can* imagine it, but you can’t find clips to demonstrate that Takei was ever capable of that range as an actor. We all love Sulu and we all love George (and in the TV series based on my novel *FlashForward*, our second lead was John Cho, who went on to play Sulu in the Abrams *Trek* movies — John *could* convincingly do anything, and there were serious discussions by the suits about making him the primary lead in the second season, had we got one).

Yes, George may have shown more range in his recent stage play (which he first starred in when he was 75) than when he appeared on *Voyager* (at age 59), but there was nothing in that episode *or his previous work* to convince a studio to gamble a hundred million dollars, give or take, on a TV series with him as the lead.

**Note:** *Robert J. Sawyer is a member of the Order of Canada, the Order of Ontario, the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame, and the scriptwriters’ unions Writers Guild of Canada and Writers Guild of America. His 24th novel, The Oppenheimer Alternative, comes out June 2, 2020.*

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## TONIGHT’S ANIMATED SHOW – THE TICK

*By Michael Bertrand*

(Previously blogged online September 30, 2010)

Specifically, *The Tick Versus Season Two*.

I have been watching the previews. Apparently, they think there is a good chance that people who love *The Tick* will also turn out to want *The Muppet Show* on DVD.

Can’t argue with *that*.

As I am a huge *Tick* fan, the usual warning about fannish gushing and squeeing applies to tonight’s blog.

### ***First Episode: The Little Wooden Boy and the Belly of Love***

I don’t think I have seen this one before. The name does not sound familiar and holy crap, an anthropomorphic whale just emerged from the ocean, wearing overalls and walking like a man.

And he’s whale-sized, too.

I might as well get this over with right now: I love you, Ben Edlund. I love you so very much. You never know what the hell you are going to see in a *Tick* production, but you know it will be wild and weird and lovable and funny as hell.

That is the exact sort of thing I love, and what I hope to make myself some day, God willin' and the crick don't rise.

Apparently, his name is Blowhole.

Now Arthur and the Tick are fighting the Angry Red Herring, who, I am guessing, is just there to distract them from the REAL crime.

The real enemy appears to be the Swiss Army, who have giant Swiss Army Knives. Of course.

Now the Tick is angrily whittling. That sounds like a very dangerous activity for a super strong, nigh invulnerable nutcase who is not known for his caution.

I have been a *Tick* fan ever since the days of the comic book. A friend let me read his issue number two of the comic, and I was instantly hooked. Edlund is a comic genius who creates the most wonderfully weird characters and situations and peppers it all with clever dialogue and fairly decent art. Amazing stuff.

I said it was dangerous for the Tick to be whittling. I had no idea. He has now made a crude wooden puppet of a small boy and is talking to it like it's his new sidekick now that this Carmelita chick has shown up in a flying suit just like Arthur's and is monopolizing Arthur's time.

I guess that explains the Little Wood Boy in the title. I have a terrible feeling that the Belly of Love will involve Blowhole somehow.

And when I say involve him, I mean in the sense that Jonah got involved with a whale. (As did the original little wooden boy, Pinnochio, come to think of it.)

I have this terrible feeling that this Carmelita chick is just leading Arthur on and is going to break his heart when it turns out she only wants what is in his moth suit.

If that is true, then I hope she gets hit by a bus. Nobody hurts Arthur!

All right, American Maid to the rescue! The nation's most patriotic domestic! She is made of awesome. Wow, Der Fleidermaus actually did something useful for once. He alerted American Maid that Arthur was in trouble. Good job, DF.

Ayup. They're in the whale now. It was narratively inevitable.

"But what was really chasing us? Where were we really trapped? Come on, Arthur! *Get Meta with Me!*"

OK, that is my brand new all time favorite Tick quote. It is like a post-modern battle cry of sheer joy. *Get Meta with Me!*

It makes me want to launch into a detail discussion of whether the Yogi Bear cartoon universe is the same as the one with the Flintstones and the Jetsons in it!

*Of course it is!*

One of the Tick's most endearing attributes is his enthusiasm for life. He lives his life with unbridled gusto and that is something quite rare in the world, especially amongst us Generation X types. The Tick is so enthusiastic about fighting evil and being a superhero that it can be a little dangerous to be around him, but you can't stay mad at him because he is just a big (*big*) nigh invulnerable kid at heart.

## ***Second Episode: Armless But Not Harmless***

Amongst this show's many sterling attributes is one of the most awesomely funky and goofy theme songs ever.

It must have been fun for the session singers to come in and just go "Doo doo dwee, dat dat dat dwee dow!" I bet that's the kind of job they tell others in their field about when people are swapping stories of the weird and fun gigs they have done.

"Halt, villains! Knock off all that evil!" Another epic Tick quote.

Oh right, this one I have seen. It's the one with the Enemy Awards, the Emmys for supervillains, and the villainess Venus who seems to have a hypnotic power over men.

Her voice sound extremely familiar, but I can't tell if it is because I know that voice from somewhere in particular, or it's just a generic female evil voice like I have heard many other places.

Strangely, the IMDB entry for this episode does not give a separate voice credit for Venus, even though it gives one for her happily henpecked husband, named Milo (of course).

There's just the usual cast, Gerrit Graham as Milo, and "additional voices." How strange. I guess Venus is probably done by Linda Gary, as she's the only female in the Additional Voices credits.

Milo talks like the Millionaire from *Gilligan's Island*, or if you prefer, William F. Buckley Junior, including using Latin phrases at every possible moment and fawning over his big brute of a wife.

She is the classic Evil Dowager, with pearls and the snotty upper class American accent. And now they have, quite horrifyingly and quite literally, disarmed the Tick and Arthur. Zapped them with a ray that makes their arms fall off. Eeek.

Fits with their "Venus de Milo" theme, I suppose, but it's a good thing this is a cartoon and the arms are just flopping on the ground, intact and alive, and their loss is not actually causing pain or injury to our stalwart heroes, like it would if things were a tad more realistic.

"All right, if you're so evil now, why don't you just ... *Eat this kitten*" "Mew!" That is another moment of Epic *Tick*. Edlund, you magnificent madman of merriment, you!

Owe Em Gee, a cameo by everyone's favorite *Tick* villain, the Evil Midnight Bomber What Bombs at Midnight. He gets turned away at the door of the Enemy Awards because he has no invitation.

"One of these days! Milkshake! *Boom!*" You have to love this guy.

One of those weird synchronicities has been dogging me lately. It seems like everywhere I turn, there is someone with a Edie McClurg *Fargo*-style Minnesota "Aww geez dere, that's gonna be a *problem*" accent lately. It started when I was talking about *Fargo* with some people online, then I have a random *Inspector Gadget* on while I am making my popcorn and one of the character there has that accent, and

now this random plumber with a knack for saving the day on this episode of *The Tick* has one.

It's a great accent because it's, well, adorable, honestly. And it is not hard to imagine it being related somehow to the Bob and Doug Mackenzie "Hoser" accent.

Now I want to see Edie McClurg play Bob and Doug's grandmother or maybe a former teacher of theirs some time.

I was talking about *Fargo* online because the subject of female characters came up and I had the Coen brothers on my mind anyhow, so I remembered what has to be one of the most effective movie "conscience" characters ever, the pregnant sheriff from *Fargo*. Just waddling around, being massively pregnant and searching for justice and being all amazingly calm and pragmatic about the whole thing.

I mean, she just stops in the middle of a sentence and says "Hang on ... gotta barf" and does so, then goes back to the conversation with her deputy like nothing had happened. This is a woman who is ready for life. This is not her first kid, and won't be her last, and she just calmly accepts that when you are pregnant, sometimes, you gotta barf.

Words cannot describe how much I admire that calm acceptance of life. It's part of what makes her such an awe-inspiringly cool character who really makes the film work by being this quiet force of goodness and decency making her unhurried but effective way through the plot of the film, catching up with our evildoers, and providing a much needed counterpoint to the tale of sad, pathetic evil that is the main plot of the movie. And at the end, when she is asking Steve Buscemi "Why did you do it, eh? It's only money. It's only money, eh," it seems like such a perfect condemnation of all the body in a wood chipper shit that had been going on in the movie that in a way, it makes us the audience feel a lot better. Someone spoke for us. And it was this extraordinary embodiment of good, decent, simple, honest American goodness. A hugely pregnant female sheriff.

It takes genius to even imagine a character like that.

They have their arms back. Phew. The plumber with the accent was able to re-attach the arms for them. Which makes about as much sense anything, I guess.

Do I feel like doing one more? Aw sure, what the hell. I might as well humor my weird compulsion to do things in threes.

### ***Third Episode: Leonard da Vinci and His Fightin' Genius Time Commandos***

Not sure if I have seen this one before either.

The Tick and Arthur (well, mostly the Tick) certainly do a lot of casual harm to the masonry and brickwork of the City. Probably makes a lot of work for bricklayers and roofers.

They seem to be sort of implying that Leonardo da Vinci and Mona Lisa were a couple. Um, I don't think so, unless she had a dick under that dress of hers. Leo was not so into the ladies. In fact, he seemed to prefer the company of pretty youths that were his "apprentices."

Because really, what's the use of being one of history's greatest artists and greatest minds if it doesn't get you a lil somethin' somethin'?

Then again, to nitpick *The Tick* for historical accuracy is probably up there with getting mad about how Socrates was portrayed in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*.

A villain has abducted history's greatest geniuses in order to ... meh, it's too complicated to explain. But Ben Franklin is being very grumpy and standoffish and prickly, so I am guessing he was abducted mid-whore.

The voice of the villain, the Mother of Invention, sounds familiar too.

What de FUHUK? According to the IMDB entry for this episode, the voice of said villain is provided by Paul Williams. And not just any Paul Williams, *the* Paul Williams, legendary singer/songwriter of the seventies, composer of film sound tracks and writer of such great songs as *Just an Old Fashioned Love Song* (famously covered by Three Dog Night, amongst others) and *Rainbow Connection*, the theme song to *The Muppet Movie* and wonderful thing to have exist in the world period.

I am having that pop culture whiplash feeling again. What the hell is Paul Williams, legend of music, doing playing a villain on some random episode of *The Tick*? And does this, somehow, have something to do with *The Muppets*? That's where I know Paul Williams from. Like most of the seventies celebrities I remember, I know him from his appearance on *The Muppet Show*, where much was made of how short he is and how nice it was to be around Muppets, who were smaller than him.

It's just such a weird and unexpected connection (a Rainbow Connection?) that my pop culture soaked post modern Generation X brain is left reeling.

I mean, what the hell?

Leonard da Vinci is a Jim Cummings voice, and sounds like one. To me, Jim Cummings will always be Pete, the next door neighbor and occasional villain on *Goof Troop*. For us Disney nerds, seeing the classic cigar-chomping brute of many a Disney short, often credited as Peg Leg Pete or some close variation, become Goofy's ethically challenged but for the most part harmless neighbour on that show was, well, pretty weird. But in a good way. And somehow, he managed to remind me of a lot of middle class guys with a lot of ambition and aggression.

Plus, he had his wife, Peg (of course), who continuously kept him in check with her own amazingly high aggression levels, so he never got to be too bad a villain. Not if she heard about it first, anyhow.

Makes sense, really, that a guy like Pete would need a wife like Peg to keep him in line.

Of course, to Tick fans, Jim Cummings is most famous for his absolutely delightful and very un-Pete role as interdimensional villain and general oozy creepy thing Thrakkorzog, who had a marvellously Tim-Curry-esque voice, and a sentient tongue that longed to EAT RUDE BRAINS.

And speaking of amazingly non-Pete like roles done by the staggeringly talented Jim Cummings, while researching that last bit, I found out that he does the voice of Winnie the Pooh now! Wow. He really is a god amongst voice actors. To be the one chosen to take over such a distinctive and important Disney voice as Winnie the



Pooh, a character beloved by millions, after the original Winnie voice, Sterling Holloway, passed away in 1992, that is truly an amazing honor and continues Cummings' legacy as being Disney's golden hero of voice talent.

I know, I know, I am being a Disney nerd again. I can't help it. I got a Disney encyclopedia has a child and it has stayed with me since!

Not into Pooh? Sterling Holloway was also the original voice of Sugar Bear from the Sugar Crisps ads. "Can't get enough of those Sugar Crisps..." Remember him now?

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## MESSED-UP MOVIE MOPES

**Orson Welles *Moby Dick*** – I was watching Christopher Lee being interviewed and, when asked "Who was the most interesting director to work with?" he replied "Orson Welles, when we were making *Moby Dick*." You can bet that got my attention! Never seen this film version of the novel. Never even heard of it. What the heck?

Turns out Welles had written and produced/directed a play based on Melville's novel which had been performed in England in 1955. He then decided to film his play at the theatre. Christopher Lee was among the cast, playing a character (a sailor?) named Flask. Lee found the experience decidedly odd, for, he claimed, no sets or props were used. He didn't mention costumes. Perhaps there were none. Just the actors performing in modern clothing performing for the camera? And as often as not, there was no film in the camera. Lack of funding, you see. Welles always had trouble raising money. Investors didn't trust him. Too intellectual. No popular appeal.

According to Lee, as I remember the interview, Welles would direct rehearsals from the back of the theatre. "Then, when it came time to shoot the scene, he came bouncing down the aisle ... no, not bouncing ... flowing down the aisle like a Spanish Galleon confronting turbulent waves." Seems Welles had already become rather a huge man.

One time the camera man protested. "You haven't set up the scene yet." To which Welles replied, "You do it. Surprise me."

Most disconcerting of all, while performing their scenes, Welles would be standing beside the camera speaking their lines loudly enough to distract the actors from their own delivery. Must have been very annoying. Perhaps it was Welles way of inspiring them to act up a storm, with their lines presumably recorded later to be dubbed in.

Intrigued, I checked Wikipedia. Seems it was a two-act drama, titled *Moby Dick—Rehearsed*, performed June 16<sup>th</sup> to July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1955, at the Duke of York's Theatre in London. Supposedly a bunch of actors in a 19<sup>th</sup> century repertory company are fooling around on stage waiting to begin a rehearsal of *King Lear*. Then the Manager (played by Orson Welles) comes out smoking a big cigar and tells everyone they're going to rehearse *Moby Dick* instead. Annoyed, the cast, which includes Gordon Jackson as Ishmael and Patrick McGeehan as Starbuck, begins improvising with props found on stage and grudgingly settle into character.

According to Wikipedia: “Welles used minimal stage design. The stage was bare, the actors appeared in contemporary street clothes, and the props were minimal. For example, brooms were used as oars, and a stick was used for a telescope. The actors provided the action, and the audience’s imagination provided the ocean, costumes, and the whale.”

Filming lasted three days. Allegedly 75 minutes worth was shot, but the dim stage lighting Welles preferred ruined around 35 minutes of footage as it was so dark as to be unwatchable. Years later the camera man, Hilton Craig, said “It was by no means merely a photographed stage-play. On the contrary, it was shot largely in closeups and looked very impressive on near-completion.” Patrick McGoohan commented in 1986 that the footage he saw when Welles was viewing the rushes “looked fantastic.” Regardless, Welles decided it wasn’t going to work as a film and gave up on it.

So, what happened to the footage? Wikipedia reports two versions. The first, which “[needs citations]”, reports that a drunken Robert Shaw (famous actor), while renting Welles’ home in Madrid, was smoking in bed and accidentally started a fire which destroyed the surviving footage. The second version states the footage is preserved in the Munich film Museum, but has deteriorated so badly that it cannot be shown or even copied. Nevertheless conservators are hoping future film technology will someday be advanced enough to restore the footage.

Oddly enough Welles made a second attempt in 1971, filming about 22 minutes of assorted scenes from the play in which this modest actor played *all* the parts himself. Welles was not noted for being humble. He left all of his unfinished films to his mistress, Oja Kodar, who in turn donated them to the Munich Film Museum. The 22-minute film has been restored and is occasionally shown at film festivals. It is not, alas, available otherwise.

Personally, I think Welles missed a bet in his limited concept of his play. I always thought Zero Mostel did an incredible job portraying a man turning into a Rhinoceros in the 1974 film *Rhinoceros*, based on the play by Eugène Ionesco. I suspect Orson Welles, an equally great actor, would have made a magnificently malignant Moby Dick. Imagine him breaching the surface festooned with harpoons! Crushing a whaling boat to splinters! Dragging Captain Ahab to his death! Only an actor of Welles genius level, and massive girth, could have pulled it off. Would pay good money to see that.

***Ten Films from the 1930s You Need in Your Collection*** – Why? So you can watch them at least once a year like I do. The first five will be iconic films that are simply among the best of the era. The second five, not necessarily the worst, nor iconic exactly, but certainly among the most highly entertaining of the era, at least in my opinion.

FIVE BEST FILMS:

***Vampyr*** (1932) – This is an extraordinary film. I first read about it when I purchased *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* by Carlos Clarens in 1967. Half a

century went by before I finally got to see it. Allan Gray, a student of the occult, strolls into Courtempierre village and takes a room in an inn. He's startled awake by an old man in a bathrobe entering his room. "She mustn't die, you understand?" says the man, who then leaves a package marked "To be opened on event of my death."

In the morning Allan goes for a walk outside the village. He notes a reflection in the water of a moving figure who isn't there. Then the shadow of a man digging sod, who also isn't present. He comes across a derelict and complex building, rather like a labyrinth and very eerie. He sees the shadow of a lone-legged soldier. Said veteran is sitting on a bench, shadowless. The soldier's shadow stomps up, sits down beside him, and assumes his position. A rather evil version of Albert Einstein (looks like him, anyway) is also wandering about. And an invisible dog, evidently a small one, judging by its yipping. At one point Allan asks the weird Einstein-like character "Do you hear the dogs?" and gets the exasperated reply "There are no dogs here." Allan also discovers a room full of shadows dancing to merry music. A door at the end of a long corridor flings open and a dignified but rather terrifying-looking elderly woman raises her cane and shouts "Silence!" The shadows disappear. Allan flees.

Allan next discovers an estate owned by the man who had appeared to him in his room at the Inn. While peering in through a window, Allan sees a shadow on the ceiling "open up" and reveal the shadow of the one-legged soldier aiming a rifle at the elderly man. He fires, and the man drops, albeit without a visible wound. Long story short, man dies, package contains a book on vampires, Allan sticks around comforting the youngest daughter Léone while the other daughter Gisèle lies abed dying with mysterious marks on her throat. At one point Gisèle goes sleep walking. Allan and Léone discover her draped over a log, the old woman apparently supping on her neck. Annoyed, the old woman (who later is revealed to be a deceased naughty woman named Marguerite Chopin) drifts away.

At night the doctor comes. Turns out to be "Einstein" from the building of living shadows. He says the victim needs blood, human blood. Allan reluctantly volunteers. The Doctor drains blood from his arm into a vial, then leaves him in another room to recover. At one point Allan cries out. The doctor opens the door of Gisèle's bedroom. "What's wrong?"

"I'm losing blood," cries Allan.

"Nonsense," the Doctor snaps. "I have it here," and closes the door.

After quite a bit of stuff I'm skipping past, Allan goes in search of Léone who has been kidnapped. He trips and falls, hurting his leg. Sitting on a park bench in order to recover, his "soul" or, at least, a transparent version of himself, splits away from his body and goes to the building of shadows. There he finds his body lying in a coffin. A coffin lid with a small window is placed over his coffin. Suddenly we see the body's point of view. We see the one-legged soldier screwing down the coffin lid. We watch from below as the soldier places a candle on the window and lights it. Then Marguerite grabs the candle and moves it around to get enough light as she peers in at the corpse. Then follows a long sequence as the coffin is picked up and taken out to be buried. We see the shadows on the ceiling of several rooms, then passing

through the doorway and now we see nothing but sky and trees. The corner of the church looms up and is left behind. Suffering from death-like symptoms and being buried alive used to be a common phobia. This sequence perhaps reflects the tail end of that fear. Certainly it's quite unsettling for the viewer.

Fortunately the coffin is carried past Allan still sitting on the bench. His "soul" leaps from the coffin and merges with his body on the bench, at which point the burial party fades away. The Marguerite the Vampyr gets hers, the evil Doctor gets his, and Allan gets Léone. Poor Gisèle is freed from her curse and dies peacefully. A happy ending of sorts, I guess.

Thing is it is established at the very beginning that Allen is so "in" to his research he is no longer able to tell the difference between reality and dream. Yet the plot indicates we should take the supernatural elements literally and seriously. Based on the short story Carmillia by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Danish Director Carl Theodor Dreyer didn't bother adhering to the plot so much as using it as an excuse for a tremendously evocative atmosphere where supernatural evil is palpably real and dominant. There are only two professional actors in the film, the Lord of the Chateau and Léone. The others were "characters" Dreyer ran into in shops and cafes. Allan Gray, credited to the pseudonym Julian West, was actually Baron Nicolos de Gunzburg who was also, by sheer coincidence, the film's financial backer. He does a pretty good job of looking puzzled and perplexed, which is all the role calls for.

To sum up: the pace is glacially slow, but that doesn't matter, it's not an action film; it's the helpless logic of a nightmare made real. Visually, it's a stunning film.

**King Kong** (1933) – I've got to wonder; are there fans out there who've never seen this film? I first saw it at the age of 17 projected on a sheet in someone's back yard at the Toronto Triple Fan Fair in 1968. Are there fen out there who only know it as "that film with the ape?" Or perhaps "that film with the stupid CGI." Or "Ugh, black and white. I'm not watching that crap." In other words, are there people who have heard of the film but refuse to watch it because it doesn't measure up to modern films? Could be. Sad, if true.

To those in the know, it's a great film, a series of spectacular effects scenes: the stegosaur sequence, the raft attack, the Kong versus T-Rex battle, the shake the puny humans off the log tragedy, Kong on a rampage through the village, and so on. One brilliant spectacle after another. The Star Wars of its day in audience impact.

And yet, oddly enough, because of these very scenes, the rest of the movie is curiously underrated. Generally known as the film where Fay Wray screams a lot. Yes, in a sense, the characters take second-billing to the action as happened in Harryhausen's two Sinbad sequels. But the fact is the characters in King Kong are intelligently and efficiently set up in the beginning of the film with clever lines and subtle interplay, such that you care about them as when they get caught up in the dramatic action.

Carl Denham, for instance. In the Peter Jackson version Jack Black plays him as some kind of obsessive fanatic, a thoroughly unlikeable guy, impossible to empathise with. It's a one-note performance. But Robert Armstrong plays him as a sympathetic

guy under the P.T. Barnum bluster, quite reasonable actually, most of the time. He's quick to reassure Ann when he's trying to recruit her that he means "no funny business." There he's being honest rather than bombastic. As the Captain puts it when Discroll asks him if he thinks Denham is crazy, "No, just enthusiastic." Only when caught up in excitement at the prospect of capturing Kong does his view of Ann's role approach madness. A momentary thing. After all, he's quick off the mark when he realises the newspaper photographers are spooking Kong, running toward them yelling at them to stop. He's actually kinda likeable. I feel sorry for him in the opening scenes of *Son of Kong* when he's being hounded by all the collection agencies for all the damage King Kong caused. Not what he had intended.

Then there's Bruce Cabot as John "Jack" Driscoll, the first mate who doesn't want a woman onboard. A genuine superstition still believed by some mariners even today. In his case it seems pure misogyny, because he hates women, despite being portrayed as a big lug with a heart of gold. Not exactly a modern role model. But, as made clear by the dialogue and interplay with Fay Wray as Ann Darrow, he's afraid of women, ill at ease with them, and, who knows? Maybe still a virgin. Not your usual leading man. When Ann protests his treatment of her, he quietly replies, "No, I'm just afraid for you ... kinda afraid *of* you, too." In fact he's just dying to fall in love, and does, head over heels. Risks his life several times to save her, too.

Admittedly, Ann's dialogue for much of the film consists of screaming, but first she's established as a down-on-her-luck but self-assured young woman unafraid to grab hold of a miraculous opportunity when Denham makes his offer. She appears to be far more sophisticated in matters of love than Driscoll. At first she just sort of fends him off, then fences with him a bit, then warms to him once she realises he is the genuine article. A bit sappy perhaps, but good enough to break the monotony of a long voyage. His proving to be frequently handy at keeping her alive goes a long way toward justifying Driscoll as a suitable life partner methinks. Not so much love at first sight so much as "Dang! This guy is useful."

By the way, just as Ann and Driscoll get to kissing, and the Captain shouts out from the wheelhouse "Jack! Are you on deck?" and he replies, with a wide smile, "Yes, sir!" this would get a huge guffaw from the contemporary audience. "On deck," in the context of dating, was basically slang for "Getting next in line to have sex."

Speaking of which, Denham himself makes much of the "Beauty and the Beast" angle. But that's just the angle, the gimmick he wants to use to sell his film to the public. It's obviously preposterous. Laughable. Part of the exaggeration of his persona. Kong himself seems fascinated with Ann as something new, something different, like a sparkly new toy, something to puzzle over and play with. He is animated with a personality all his own, exhibiting some mannerisms Willis O'Brien allegedly based on his own, but pulling away Ann's clothes and sniffing at them I think we can safely say is the action of a curious animal acting on instinct. Yes, Kong becomes very possessive of her, and protective, but I don't think the sex drive of a giant gorilla is the motivation. Have you ever tried to take away the favourite toy of a dog or a cat? Frankly, I think some critics read far too much into the relationship of

Kong and Ann. Just more proof Freud has been a very bad influence.

Thing is I think the film does an excellent job of setting up the characters of Denham, Driscoll, and Ann, allowing the viewers to get to know them to the point of caring about them throughout the film. So many modern films fail to do this to any comparable level of depth. For monster action films, *King Kong* set the standard.

What about racism? Victor Wong as Charlie the Cook is actually treated fairly decently. For one thing, he's the one who discovers Ann has been kidnapped and sounds the alarm. For another, he attempts to join the rescue party brandishing a kitchen knife and a sailor snarls "This is no place for a cook!" He could have said something much worse. And would have, in many a non-genre film back then. Charlie is still a stereotype, but not attacked as such.

And then there's Noble Johnson as the Native chief, and all the rest of the villagers, complete with nose bones and bustles of dried grass. I think some of the culture of New Guinea islanders was drawn upon as inspiration here. There are photos in some of my old National Geographics that could be mistaken for stills from the movie, so not as completely implausible as people assume. And when Kong goes on a rampage, sure, people run. Wouldn't you? They also fight back. They're not cowards.

Granted, Kong steps on a couple of natives, and chews a few of them to bits, but he does the same thing to New Yorkers (if you've ever seen the uncensored version). And what could be more nightmarish than the scene where Kong pulls a sleeping woman from her hotel bed, holds her upside down to examine her, sees she isn't Ann, and casually drops her to her screaming death? Everyone is helpless in the grip of this apex predator. Kong ain't no cuddly cutie. Whites are just as helpless and doomed as blacks.

My point is that the film is racist in it's use of stereotypes of the era, but it isn't consciously or deliberately racist, unlike many, many films of the 1930's. I would go so far as to suggest some whites may have been offended by the film for not being racist enough. Incredible as it may seem to modern audiences, studios were hypersensitive to such accusations back then. Financial considerations, profit or loss, dictated Hollywood's social conscience, or lack there-of. Yes, there were exceptions. But *King Kong* is neither racist nor anti-racist, it just made use of stereotypes as a kind of cultural shorthand to accent the spectacle. I doubt the makers of the film gave the concept of racism a moment's thought.

Now, let me address the missing "spider" sequence. The sailors dropped from the log get eaten by assorted monstrous beasts. Allegedly animator Willis O'Brien considered this his best work in the film. Director Merian C. Cooper said it was dropped because it disrupted the flow and momentum of the action, brought it to a standstill in fact. Of course, Director Peter Jackson went to town on this sequence in his version, producing a lengthy and disgusting (if you have an insect phobia) sequence that was a masterpiece of its kind, but came across as self-indulgent (like many another scene), ultimately contributing to a bloated film that needed judicious cutting. This would seem to conform Cooper's decision to leave the sequence out.

However, loving the original as much as he does, Jackson couldn't resist researching all available information, including a few surviving photos and the original script, to recreate the original spider sequence as it may actually have been filmed. He includes it in the Blu-ray of the original Kong accompanying his film, albeit as a separate piece. As reconstructed, it runs: brontosaurus chase scene from the swamp, running from the styracosaurus, running on to the log, being shaken off the log, four guys killed by assorted monsters, Driscoll cutting the vine to drop the two-legged lizard, Driscoll and Denham shouting at each other across the ravine.

Jackson's version for his film seems to go on forever. But, the spider sequence as filmed according to the script of the original movie passes quickly and doesn't disrupt or stall the momentum of the action one bit, to my way of thinking. I believe Cooper made a mistake in cutting it.

Perhaps it was merely a matter of keeping the length of the film within bounds from the theatres' point of view and this seemed a handy couple of minutes that could be thrown away without rendering the plot incomprehensible. This is probable. Other scenes cut include the Triceratops, the Arsinoitherium, the styracosaurus, Ann and Jack fleeing down the river, Kong angrily climbing down Skull Mountain after them, plus numerous bits of business and snippets of dialogue. Unlike say, *Planet of the Dinosaurs*, there is no pointless and boring padding in this film.

Those scenes cut out, including the original spider sequence, remain lost. The Jackson recreation is the best glimpse of what it might have been like. Kudos to Peter Jackson for undertaking the project. For the version he did for his own film ... well ... impressive in its way, but was it really necessary? Outrageously icky scene. Humorous, if you're in the right mood.

By the way, *King Kong* was not Hitler's favourite film. I can't follow the logic behind this legend. Supposedly he saw Kong as a giant metaphor for a primitive and savage black man lusting after a white woman. How the hell this would make an extreme racist nut-bar like him love the film is beyond me. Seems like total B.S. in my opinion. Fortunately, and contrary to pop-history myth, there is no evidence he ever saw *King Kong*. Fritz Lang's *De Nibelungen: Siegfried/Kriemhild's Rache* he watched at least 20 times, according to Heinrich Hoffman, his personal photographer. That seems the most likely candidate for his favourite film. Just so you know.

To conclude, I believe, flaws and all, *King Kong* is a masterpiece in far more ways than it is generally given credit for. It was designed to be a fantasy spectacle, and nothing but. Cooper once stated he "had no intention of making a 'plausible' picture. In fact, I couldn't imagine anything more implausible." Sure is fun, though.

**Note:** I ran out of time to research and review the other eight films from the 1930s I had intended to cover. So consider this part one of the article. I will write about as many as I can in the next installment.

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# THE LIGHT-HEARTED VITUPERATOR AND JOLLY REVILER

*By Stan G. Hyde*

“Men go and come, but earth abides.”

Ecclesiastes 1:4

At times like these, with the world in the grip of a pandemic, International travel severely curtailed, and amazing amounts of communication being handled by computer information systems in lieu of direct contact between human beings ...

I really like being a Science Fiction fan.

In no way am I saying I like the Global Pandemic, or would have wished such a thing on all those poor people who are suffering at this time.

But I am glad we have science on our side. And I am glad that Science Fiction has, throughout my life, been teaching me not only that things could be different, but that they inevitably will be.

And I am aware, that as I move through the changed world ... avoiding travel, standing six feet apart from others in the lines outside CostCo ... working with my colleagues in the International School system via Skype and Zoom ... that Science Fiction has prepared me for this.

At the risk of sounding like I’m being positive about the virus—which I am not—I am somehow happy to have the truths that I’ve understood all my life to some degree confirmed.

That is, there is nothing normal about normal life.

Any life we have is a brief interlude of nature, time and history cut from the fabric of eternity. What seems to be normal is as transitory as the life of a Mayfly though it may be framed in timespans that describe the retreat of glaciers (which are, of course, retreating faster every day).

This thing we’ve agreed upon—this global civilization—is built of concepts and ideas that can be instantly toppled by change. It is not real, it is our construction. That it works at all, that food moves from farms to hungry mouths, that sick people find solace and life from medical professionals, that government systems work (well in some cases at least) to bring unity to populations in times of crisis ... all this is because we agree it is and agree to bring it about. And, as times changes, we may need to—suddenly and with short notice—decide to totally change this global project we share.

Change is constant—it’s just the shortness of our lives that disguises that.

So, when I watch Stephen Colbert on “A Late Show,” broadcast at this point from his living room instead of the Ed Sullivan theatre, with guests appearing via internet hook-up, and Jean Batiste (who for those who don’t watch the show is the bandleader for the show) plays a ditty from *Dawn of the Dead* sometimes before the commercial breaks—it is funny, even as it isn’t.

Not quite the Zombie Apocalypse ... but close. We get it. Science Fiction has shown us this for so long that we get it.

Of course, the title for this column is the title of a classic science fiction novel by George R. Stewart.

It was written in 1949, and in it the character Isherwood Williams recovers from a rattlesnake bite, and measles, and when he emerges from the woods he find that most of the people in the world have died of a pandemic—spread particularly through the vector of international air travel. (Apparently it was a big influence on Stephen King when he wrote *The Stand* (1978))

Allow me to quote briefly from Wikipedia (isn't the future wonderful?)

On the first page Stewart tells readers how contagion could bring the end very quickly for mankind:

"If a killing type of virus strain should suddenly arise by mutation ... it could, because of the rapid transportation in which we indulge nowadays, be carried to the far corners of the earth and cause the deaths of millions of people. – W. M. Stanley, in *Chemical and Engineering News*, December 22, 1947."

Within a few pages he makes it clear that basic biology applies to humans too:

"Some zoologists have even suggested a biological law: that the number of individuals in a species never remains constant, but always rises and falls—the higher the animal and the slower its breeding-rate, the longer its period of fluctuation [...] As for man, there is little reason to think that he can in the long run escape the fate of other creatures, and if there is a biological law of flux and reflux, his situation is now a highly perilous one .... Biologically, man has for too long a time been rolling an uninterrupted run of sevens."

Again, I'm not writing to extoll the virtues of a global pandemic, but I remain happy that over the years I've had the experience of living through all kinds of alternative realities (and not just disastrous ones) in my mind.

Because in some way, I think it helps me recognize the place we are at right now. Tomorrow is not yesterday, it never was but we might have stopped noticing for a while, and now it's been hammered home.

We live in a universe where black holes swallow stars and supernova sterilize star systems with blasts of radiation. The scale of change is gigantic, at the biggest and the smallest levels. I suppose you could react like H.P. Lovecraft did (at times at least):

"The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents ... someday the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new Dark Age."

I suppose that is one way of looking at things. Every so often I'm given to dark thoughts too - worry about when the asteroid will hit, or unpleasantly reminded how the Presidency of Donald J. Trump seems so uncomfortably close to something Phillip

K. Dick could have written. (A bit like William Rotsler's *To the Land of the Electric Angel*, too, I guess.)

But I'm reminded that changes that stem from disastrous events are not all bad.

Oil prices have dropped, and perhaps this is the first moment when the planet that is so disastrously devoted to fossil fuels will see the balance pivot away from that unrenowable resource and those who would get rich off of it because they do not have the imagination to do the next thing. The satellite pictures have cleared a little. The emissions have dropped a little. This is not enough to save us, but it has shown us that things can change.

Surely, no one who has lived through this time, will ever be quite so blasé about joys as simple as shaking someone's hand, or spending time over a meal together. This was always a gift, of course, but we have been reminded vividly what a gift it is.

Businesses all over the globe have been forced to move meetings and work to the internet, with folks working from home. (Just a tad closer to Clifford Simak's *City*—yes, there are problems that come from staying at home too.) Many businesses that previously were loath to adapt to modern times may find that there is no reason to go back to the way things were.

And, we while we have seen immense suffering, and examples of monumentally bad planning, we have also seen countries and citizens take responsibility for each other in ways that go far beyond what the old model of capitalism, or enlightened self-interest, or government could have expected. To a large degree, with some startlingly zombie-like exceptions where protestors gathered together to protest restrictions because they could not get their hair cut or tattooed ... the bulk of civilization has taken responsibility for social isolation.

Most of us have chosen to restrict our movements and our actions—not necessarily to keep ourselves safe, but to keep safe others who are more vulnerable. Sure I don't want to get the virus ... but I particularly don't want your grandmother to get the virus.

We've changed because we had to when faced with a disastrous scenario.

And to me, as a human being, but particularly as a Science Fiction reader, that gives me a lot of hope.

Change is inevitable. Disasters will come. Some are unavoidable.

But if we all pull together, we can beat even some of the worst scenarios.

How's that for being human!

Take that uncaring universe!

Stay safe, everybody. (Love that that has become a common way of signing off) I hope you stay well through this thing.

I want to end with something a friend of mine, Jennifer Hartley-Ortiz, wrote a few weeks ago:

"A thought ....

As a writer I have contemplated what could I possibly write at a time like this that someone somewhere has not already said? Today I thought about this a lot. I have nothing new to share, but I do have some thoughts that are prominent in my head as

I read yet another message on social media that begins with the words, ‘when things go back to normal ...’.

I have read these words time and time again in the last few weeks and each time I read them all I feel is sadness and fear.

I hope and pray things never go back to ‘normal’ for if they do, we have learned nothing from these testing times. If things return to normal we will have failed to heed the lessons of these weeks and months; we will have forgotten what true priorities are; we will have returned to our selfish lives with our fragile egos and our misguided sense of self-importance; we will have forgotten our elders and the needy in society and we will allow class, money, politics and race to divide us once again.

And how can life ever go back to normal for the majority of us? How many of us will have lost loved ones before the worst is over? How many doctors and nurses will have lost their lives in the battle to save ours? How many medical staff and carers will suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome for months and years to come? How many will have lost their jobs, others their businesses they spent their lives building gone and no resources to rebuild?

If things ‘go back to normal’ we will continue to destroy the world we live in. We will go back to our cars and our planes, to our disregard for this planet and all of its inhabitants. We will continue to think that we are fine for now, so care little for the generations who follow and the legacy we are leaving them.

If things go back to normal we have failed to understand how precious human touch is—a handshake, a hug ...

So all I can say is that today and every day we continue to live this new reality, I hope and pray things never ‘go back to normal’. I hope and pray we create a new normal based on the invaluable lessons these times have taught us and based on compassion, love and accountability, because what we do today creates not only the world our children will inherit, it shapes the adults those children will become.”

Jennifer S. Hartley - 28th March 2020

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## IT IS WHAT IT IS

(Mansplaining the state of Fandom)

*By Garth Spencer*

On April 22<sup>nd</sup> Garth posted the following online:

“About April 19, 2020 a discussion on Journeymen of Fandom encouraged me to revive my old project to compile a flexible conrunning guide, compiled from other people's observations and expertise. Of course, the environment for conrunning will be seriously different after the current worldwide epidemic is over. Also, much of the material needs updating for 21st century conditions and hotel industry demands.

The current draft is available for you to critique and markup, if you send me a request at garth.van.spencer at [gmail.com](mailto:garth.van.spencer@gmail.com).”

Bearing this in mind, Garth contributes the following article:

Let’s turn our attention away from our vale of tears for a moment, and consider the odd things people believe, and the even odder things they do.

Of course this line begs for the derision of people who think all of fandom consists of odd people believing and doing odd things. In the spirit of charity, let us set entirely aside the odd things that mundanes do, such as the monomaniacal pursuit of increasing numbers of fiat currency, the monomaniacal pursuit of political power or information access, addictions such as gambling or prayer or sex, or the fruitless pursuit of security or justice or Bigfoot or aliens.

No, the fruitless pursuit in this article has to do with fan activities: the odd beliefs that some fans bring to fandom, and the odder things they do about their beliefs.

From the beginning of the science fiction genre, some people have created colourful incidents with their hobby horses. Hugo Gernsback, who either founded or nearly destroyed science fiction, actually believed that “scientifiction” would encourage readers to take up careers in the sciences. Claude Degler, of evil fame, actually believed that fans could be the origin of a new super-race, and chronicled his travels across North America as a quest to found the Cosmic Circle. John W. Campbell, one of the celebrated and disputed editors who shaped early science fiction, was well-known for espousing crank inventions such as the Dean Drive and the Hieronymus machine, and crank theories such as ESP and telepathy. Jerry Pournelle wrote something to the effect that H. Beam Piper—possibly the first man killed by an agent’s poor business practice—actually believed he was a visitor from another timeline, like some of his own characters. The less said about the Breendoggle, the better. And so it goes.

So it is also with fandom, perhaps less spectacularly. One of the sillier stories I came across, “The Jet-Propelled Couch”, was related by a psychiatrist, Robert Lindner, and it appeared in *Harper’s* magazine in 1954.

[The] physicist ... believed he could project himself to another solar system and live as a swashbuckling interplanetary adventurer. When he was a teenager and living on a Polynesian island, he had read a series of “strange and adventurous” science fiction/fantasy books by an American writer. The protagonist shared his name, and eventually the physicist started thinking he really was the character. But he was still able to maintain a dual identity—he sort of “astral projected” into that fantasy world while keeping the appearance of a skinny-tie wearing physicist.

Setting aside the most spectacular cases: the odd beliefs that lead to odd practices in fandom are not obvious enough to raise alarm bells, and do far more damage. I am talking about widely-shared beliefs that emerge in one or another fandom, perhaps because they fall out of touch with other fandoms, or keep telling each other strange ideas without testing them against real life, or the demands of real

businesses. As long as fans were mainly entertaining each other in small clubs, or at most trading fanzines with each other on their own dime, strange ideas were inconsequential.

Some friction with reality began to emerge as soon as fans started holding conventions.

It is worth your while to observe, carefully, how things progressed. To start with, as you probably know, SF fandom was an inexpensive way for SF readers in the Depression years to entertain themselves. The classic experience (until about the 1970s) was that people who read and enjoyed science fiction enjoyed the play with ideas, the reasoned speculation, and the new and dramatic possibilities—but were social outcasts precisely to the extent they enjoyed reasoned speculation and SF stories. A constant theme in fandom was the joy of *finally* finding someone you could talk to, either at a local SF club, or by correspondence in what amounted to a globally-dispersed village. Thus it was in the former days.

A convention, even the first Worldcon, was a microscopic event compared to the New York World Exposition. Robert Runté in Alberta had to explain to me, decades later, that originally SF conventions were expected to run at a loss. This will make better sense if you realize, these “conventions” were conceived really as house parties for a few (score) of your fan friends. But they started drawing a hundred or more, then a few hundred, fans at a time; so the organizers had to scrape up the funds to book a hotel. They had to ask the attendees to volunteer with some of the convention tasks, from running messages and equipment around up to checking badges at the doors of dealers’ rooms and art shows. If it ever seemed strange to you that a convention sold “memberships” instead of tickets, had a donation jar in the hospitality suite, or wasn’t organized mainly around actors’ interviews and autograph signings, supplemented with a great media memorabilia hucksters’ room, now you know why—there are still conventions run by and for SF fans.

Of course, as conventions changed and added some more regular features, there were conflicts with hotels, and their standard conference expectations. Regularly hotels wanted to charge more and convention committees wanted to pay less, the hotels wanted to charge for a Sunday brunch and the committees didn’t; the committees (if they thought of it) would negotiate a credit/rebate on their function space fee, against the number of room nights booked, rather than guaranteeing a “block” of booked rooms; the hotels had to be talked into letting the hospitality suite, and room parties, pay a corkage fee to serve liquor themselves, rather than letting the hotel make their money by supplying alcohol; regularly the front desk would neglect to keep the party rooms and the sleeping rooms grouped in separate areas, unless that was negotiated in the contract; staff would take down signs advertising room parties, unless they were advised otherwise; and even after negotiating a contract and paying a deposit, inevitably there was a complete changeover of hotel sales staff before the convention, and often the people actually at the hotel would take issue with the provisions the convention had extracted.

Perhaps I had better leave out all the issues with pools and hot tubs.

The hotel and conference industry makes its money off meals and drinks, much more than by renting rooms. It is as if a college fraternity wanted to hold an annual event, titled as a convention, in a hotel, in fact in order to host a frat party—and expected to negotiate a lot of perks and allowances for really rather little money. You may be asking yourself where SF fans find hotels willing to host these events. Considering the sharp dealing that some hotels have pulled, this is a real question. The simile I made above is fairly close; although there is a wide range of ages represented at any given convention, from children under 8 to seniors over 80, the median age is somewhere between the teens and the forties. From the 1970s onward, I gather, fans were students, or of the same age and demographic group (early 20s, highly mobile, not so well-heeled).

Some odd sets of beliefs and practices about convention, emerged, just before I entered fandom myself.

*Example:* Some early VCON organizers maintained that VCON could be held on the Victoria Day weekend. (VCON used to be held in May.) The theory was that everybody in Vancouver would be staying home on the long weekend and VCON could therefore expect a larger-than-usual attendance. This apparently turned out not to be true—the dynamic being that Vancouverites go see relatives or go camping or something on the Victoria Day weekend, and stay home on the following U.S. Memorial Day weekend.

*Example:* Maplecon in Ottawa, Halcon in Halifax, and some other conventions (as I found out), once laboured under the impression that a consuite or a dead dog party should be *closed* to most convention members. (I might go further about the peculiarities of the Halcon that Edmonton fans visited in the early 1980s, but that is another story.) One Conversion I attended in Calgary didn't even *have* a dead dog party. For those who don't know, originally the Dead Dog, at the end of a convention, was instituted so those who were still around after the closing ceremonies would drink all the remaining beer left over from the Hospitality Suite.

*Example:* The conflict between the desire to host a “professional” convention and a mere “Fan-run” convention goes back at least forty years. Professional conventions sell tickets and are organized mainly around actors' interviews and autograph signings, costuming, and a media memorabilia hucksters' room. This is pretty much a fixed standard. Whereas fan-run conventions are more varied; running from general-interest conventions that cater to all genre fandoms, to special-interest conventions aimed at comics fans, costumers, filk fans, gamers, media fandoms, and so on. Alas, many genre fen today, perhaps the majority, assume professional conventions are “normal” and literally do not understand what fan-run conventions are all about.

What is going on, when people form unsupported ideas and insupportable practices? Apparently, some groups will get out of touch—sometimes because they are geographically isolated, or because they don't get input from the larger fandom; it can happen to anybody—and they end up telling each other stories that drift, by degrees, away from reality.

What the hell. Maybe the fannish norms I grew to accept are now unrealistic for conventions. I have been asking myself whether the hotel industry has generally gotten more rigid, in terms of growing beyond fandom's needful requirements, or whether fandom itself has failed to evolve with the changing reality of the hotel industry. No clear answer has emerged as yet.

R. Graeme Cameron has commented that, when he chaired VCON 41, the ConCom discovered that the majority of hotels in the Lower Mainland had already priced themselves beyond reach. Only two were keenly interested in acquiring VCON and willing to cater to some, but not all, fannish traditions. In his opinion Vancouver had grown so much as a convention centre that VCON's bargaining leverage has steadily diminished, raising the possibility that someday VCON, in its traditional form, would be impossible to put on.

Now, of course, the covid-19 pandemic has been a crippling blow to tourism and the hotel industry. When will conditions revert to normal? How soon will Vancouver return to being an expensive convention centre beyond the reach of fannish pocket books?

Or, even if the virus threat disappears, will tourism recover slowly, so slowly that convention space be a buyers market where once again ConComs can dictate terms? Will we see a revival of traditional fan-run conventions? Will the glory days return?

Eventually the answers to these questions will be obvious to all.

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## FANNISH FAILURES AND FOLLIES

(News from the World of Fandom)

***“Vancouver Nerd Bar Storm Crow Closing Permanently on Commercial Drive”*** – The Vancouver Sun Newspaper headline says it all. For the past 7 years this bar catering to SF&F fen has been a magnet for them. I believe one or more fannish organizations regularly met there. Film memorabilia was displayed on the walls and a selection of board games available. Drinks with names like “Romulan Ale” and “Vulcan Mindmeld” were offered. Located on Commercial Drive, it was part of a popular artsy/bohemian district in which nerds and geeks fit right in. Management has decided, with the layout not conducive to social distancing, and the lease expiring, that it would no longer be commercially viable once lockdown is relaxed. It is closed forever. They anticipate keeping the other outlet on Broadway near the Kitsilano district open, however.

I've only been to Storm Crow once, and I believe it was the Kits location. I was there to help celebrate visiting Artist Michael D. Jackson's birthday, or marriage anniversary, or something of the sort. About a dozen people gathered, including relatives and friends. It was an enjoyable, memorable afternoon spent dining and chatting with like-minded fen. We were the kind of clientele Storm Crow targeted and



welcomed. Trying something similar, or a FRED, in a sports bar was always vaguely uncomfortable as the other patrons, and sometimes the staff, made it clear they'd rather us drink up and buzz off. Storm Crow filled a need. Hopefully the one on Broadway will survive. I understand it was always crowded, so if things ever get back to normal, I imagine it will be busier than ever. Thing is, like us, it faces the problem of surviving the waiting game.

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## UPCOMING CONVENTIONS TO PRETEND TO ENJOY

**Note:** AGoH = Author Guest of Honour, ArtGoH = Artist Guest of Honour, ComGoH = Comics Guest of Honour, FanGoH = Fan Guest of Honour, GamGoH = Gaming Guest of Honour, MedGoH = Media Guest of Honour, SciGoH = Science Guest of Honour, and Toastmaster = Toastmaster.

### 78<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention

**CONZEALAND** – ( 29<sup>th</sup> July to 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 ) – Wellington, New Zealand – **This has switched to a virtual event.** Run out of time to research, will have all kinds relevant info next issue. See < <https://conzealand.nz/> >

### Canadian Conventions

**CAN-CON** – (16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2020) – Sheraton Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario. – “The Conference on Canadian Content in Speculative Arts and Literature.” Tends to focus on written SF&F and on Science. Volunteer-run but no gaming, cosplay, or media programming. Pretty close to being a genre writer's festival. *Fonda Lee* is AGoH. *Tricia NarWani* is Editor GoH. *Sarah Megibow* is Agent GoH. Current adult membership price is \$50 CAD. Pre-registration tends to sell out. Often no price-at-the-door because maximum-capacity cap already filled.

For details see: < <https://can-con.org/> >

### American Conventions

**DRAGON CON** – (3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) – 5 major hotels in Atlanta, Georgia, but no point mentioning them since, according to the Dragon Con Web site, they are sold out. This con usually gets around 8,000 people. In September, when the second wave of Covid-19 begins to build (say some medical scientists), who knows? I imagine this mega-con feels it has no choice but to assume all will be well as the financial consequences of cancelling this huge a con would be staggering, perhaps fatal to the Con. I'm thinking hotel contract penalties. Dragon Con memberships are non-refundable, so no problem there, except for adverse reaction from fen disappointed they won't get their money back.

Self-described as “the largest multi-media, popular convention focusing on science fiction & fantasy, gaming, comics, literature, art, music, and film in the universe” it is also “run by fans like you,” which makes it, allegedly, the largest fan-run con in existence? Bigger than World-Con?

At any rate, dozens of guests and professionals currently lined up, including author S.M. Stirling and Gaming Guru Steve Jackson. They started accepting vendor applications in February, so no published list yet. I find it very interesting their vendor application states: “This is not a first-come, first-served application process. Every application is reviewed many times and then juried.” I twice handled pre-con vendor hall activity for VCON and it was something of a miracle to fill up the available table spaces. I can’t imagine the level of demand their procedure indicates.

As always these days, the future is determined by a Virus rather than human will. Or, to put it another way, the great ghod Ghu will decree. Fen will just have to hope for the best.

For details, see: < <https://www.dragoncon.org/> >

## Writing Festivals

**WHEN WORDS COLLIDE** – (~~August 14 to 16, 2020~~) – **Cancelled!** Refunds will be given if requested, but admin prefers to roll over memberships to next year.

For details see: < <https://www.whenwordscollide.org/> >

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## OOK! OOK! SLOBBER! DROOL! (Letters of Comment)

**Note:** Annoying comments by God-Editor [*are in brackets*] immediately after introduction of topic in question. This, a feeble attempt to create the illusion of a conversation in a fanzine lounge or a hospitality suite in the interests of conviviality. But mainly, to avoid tiresome necessity (if editorial comments are at the end of each LoC) to start each paragraph with “[*Re: your comment...*]” which would be a terrible waste of space (unlike this brilliant introductory note which is, of course, a triumph of its kind.)

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From: **Lloyd Penney** – (April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020)

Dear Graeme:

Thanks for issue 539 of BCSFAzine, and again, welcome back to the position. So, BCSFA has only a dozen members? I think OSFS in Ottawa is the same. I think MonSFFA in Montreal has more, but all clubs are about as active as any other group, which is to say not at all, thanks to this pandemic. At least, the newsletter can go out to club members to keep them in the loop, and that's still what BCSFAzine does.

Genre fandom is people, but the genre itself influences us all. Together, they form our community, and we form acquaintances and friendships that can last a lifetime. Defining fandom today might be difficult, given the fall of the written word, and the rise of television and film SF, plus games and comics, but it is easy to say that we are now a small minority within it, and we sometimes gather to reminisce and tell stories. As long as there isn't a pandemic going on at the time, anyway. There are so many clubs out there that are a shadow of their former selves, yet LASFS and NESFA seem quite healthy, mostly because of their huge numbers of the past, and still healthy rosters today.

Ideas? You detail a large number of groups of fans, yet there is a group of fans out there that are causing many problems. I keep hearing about them referred to as toxic fandom. They are the ones who have such a proprietary attitude towards the object(s) of their fandom, they seem to think they personally own it, and don't like any changes or additions going on within it, even from its creator. This seems to be why many creators and producers are loathe to come in contact with their property's fandom, especially at large comicons and other similar events. I have recently read articles about how the pandemic may affect or possibly kill the massive pro-run cons, with no one wanting to gather in large number for fear of catching a second wave of the coronavirus or something else. If that doesn't kill those big cons, the increasing unwillingness of the producers and creators to meet with the consuming fans may do it. I think this is a topic worthy of discussion; if we are in the end days of our own fandom, should we consider the death of fandom as a whole, through the general nastiness of a large group of people who rely on the anonymity of being on the other side of the monitor?

*[ Toxic fandom has been around since the very beginning. Gernsback helped create organized fandom as a marketing ploy, but even he realized "the fans" were a tiny minority among those who read Amazing Stories. The vast majority of fans of the genre never joined fandom, simply because they didn't know it existed. Sure, they noted people writing in and excitedly describing their clubs, zines, and what not. But as a genuine social phenomenon that would impact their life, non-existent. Irrelevant. They had their own lives to live. Just happened to like reading the stuff, that's all. The active fans of the day were very opinionated, but not generally unpleasant except to each other during the occasional fan feud.*

*Most readers in virtually all genres never wrote fan letters to publishers or authors. Couldn't be bothered. Back then one of the perks to being a SF&F writer, as opposed to virtually every other type of author, was that you could meet your fans at conventions. Nice to get the ego stroked, as it were. Occasionally some fans proved to*

*be jerks, but so did some authors. Fair is fair.*

*Everything has changed in the modern era of social media, especially as many publishers insist their authors promote themselves on same. Some fans have vastly inflated impressions of their own significance, taking upon themselves the role of speaking for all fandom. Ghu forbid anyone attempt to be creative and take book series or a film franchise in a new direction. Heresy! Some fen go out of their way to attack writers, film directors, actors and what not, including fellow fen. It's just the fannish equivalent of the divisive political trolling so pervasive on the web.*

*What actually counts is general public opinion, and it can produce surprises. The influencers aren't as influential as they prefer to believe. I believe it was Andy Warhol who said everyone gets 15 minutes of fame. In today's culture it is common to **demand** 15 minutes of fame and assume everyone is paying attention and will do so forever. Nope. I believe the majority of fen are still mostly harmless. Toxic fandom is just a sign of the times. It will pass. Eventually. Hopefully fandom will carry on. ]*

We have been self-isolating since March 17. That was the last evening we went out for a pubnight at our favorite pub, Orwell's Pub, in the Bloor/Islington area. Tomorrow night would have been our next pubnight, but we will be supporting our pub by ordering online, and picking it up. Some are considering a Zoom event, but it's not enough notice, and I found out that when I updated Windows 10 a short time ago, it scraped out a Windows7-compliant driver for a monitor with a built-in camera, and replaced it with a generic driver that does not support the camera. Gotta buy a cheap little webcam, and go from there.

You know, if it had come from anyone else, I would be very interested in what the U.S. Space Force might do. But, seeing it comes from that orangy guy in Washington, I have to wonder if the Space Force commander is putting in time until someone competent comes along, and folds the Space Force into the Air Force or NASA where it belongs.

*[ As I mentioned elsewhere, General Raymond doesn't want the Space Force infected by the cultural baggage of the Air Force. Be interesting to see what kind of outfit he has in mind. ]*

Having a fan is an experience I will not have, but must wonder how strange it is to have. Taral refers to some health problems he's been having, and recent Facebook posts make those problems sound severe right now. A return to health very soon, please. Also great Stiles artwork, and he is gone far too soon.

Rob Sawyer's column ..., I think this is Rob's take on the toxic fandom earlier in my loc. Some of that toxicity is in prodrom, too. We all need some more kindness in our respective circles. Indeed, fandom is but a tiny percentage of the whole assemblage of readers. A former owner of Bakka Books in Toronto told me that, along with his admission that he never liked science fiction, but he had the store, and did his best with it. Fandom should be fun, and to expand it into Glicksohn's Maxim,

IF<sup>3</sup>... If Fandom Isn't Fun, It's Futile.

*[ I totally agree with Glicksohn. Whole point of fandom is to have fun. That's why I have little patience with constant whining in fandom. ]*

You don't see Karl Johansen's name in many fanzines any more, do you? Great article by Garth. I found fandom in 1977 in Victoria with Stephen (Cat) Middlemiss, and the United Federation of Canadian Star Trekkers. Trek was my first fannish love, and I don't care who knows it. I am not sure how much baggage I brought into fandom, but all I really knew was how much I loved Trek and SF anthologies, and I hoped to share those loves with others, and I was not disappointed. Fandom gave me friends to last a lifetime. I found Yvonne in fandom, and we celebrate our 37<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on May 28. Fandom gave me my oldest friend, Prof. Paul Delaney, formerly second-in-command with SFAV (Science Fiction Association of Victoria) and UVICSFA (University of Victoria SF Association), and the above-mentioned UFCST. Paul's retired after a career at York University, and we renew old acquaintances from time to time. I realize that I have known him for 42 years! There's Life the Universe and Everything.

I have been approached to join FAPA several times, and I have turned down each invitation. I guess that's why I don't get those invitations any more. I have been in several apas over the years, but I guess I wanted larger audiences, like those for fanzines. Up to the present now, and I don't think there are any fannish publications with larger audiences. I have decided to keep going with writing letters to fanzines until the fanzines themselves disappear, which might be any year now.

*[ I look upon FAPA not as a limited readership but as a whole bunch of pen pals. This makes the FAPA experience quite enjoyable for me. Personal communication with some very interesting people. 16 members at the moment, I believe. 15 pen pals. I find that satisfying. ]*

With the New Zealand Worldcon now becoming a virtual con, we can make mention of Steve Davidson's advertised AmazingCon. I have offered my services for programming, but with so many pros stepping forward to promote their own projects, I suspect I shall be relegated to the virtual audience. Steve is looking at June, so we might yet have the pleasure of a virtual con. I just need to get a new webcam, and I could have some fun, too. It won't be the same, but ... Local friends have hinted at Ad Astra possibly going virtual, but I have heard nothing about that. We've rolled our memberships over to next year.

*[ Steve asked me to participate in AmazingCon, my being one of his columnists and all ... trouble is my laptop may not be able to handle Zoom. I have plenty of memory, but the machine processes slowly, sometimes it takes forever to load a Facebook clip, for instance. Or even just a large file. Sometimes I'm reduced to*

*staring out the window while the machine strives to catch up with my command. Also, I don't have a microphone or a separate web cam. It does have a built-in little "eye" so maybe ... I might get Zoom and experiment. Next issue I'll provide info on the upcoming AmazingCon and probably have a better idea if I will be able to participate.]*

(Whoops, gotta spell Penney with that extra e ....)

My letter ... Yes, we are making notes about what we want to do with our possible third trip to England. We are listing places we never saw the first two times, plus things we enjoyed so much, we want to see again. There may be other cities in England we'd like to go and see. I have been putting up the pictures of our second trip on Facebook onto my account every Thursday. We have been winding down the steampunk business, but thanks to the COVID-19, almost all the shows we have taken tables at have been cancelled and moved to the same time next year. Looks like we might not wind it up until 2022. Ad Astra was one of the many cons to announce their 2020 cancellation, and potential reschedule in 2021.

I have almost made it over to page 3! After Bell service disruptions, and a two-day power outage in my area of Etobicoke, recently there was the driver problem, and my UPS deciding to fall over dead, I really don't need any other disruptions right now. I have some work coming in electronically, and it could last for another month or so. This is why I do not need any disruptions in my internet service, and of course, that's when they all happen. The pandemic makes such service even more important. Let's hope, fingers crossed, and this nonsense is done. The new UPS is working well, and because of the pandemic, there isn't a shop around that has any webcams. I will give it some time.

All done for the moment. Thanks to the time zones, this should arrive at your home at a decent time, just as I am considering an early night. Many thanks for these commentable issues, and see you with the next.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

*[ Thank you for your letter, and thank you for carrying on the tradition of Harry Warner Jr. I look forward to your LoCs as much as I used to look forward to his. Cheers! – The Graeme ]*

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From: **Felicity Walker** – (April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

Loc on *BCSFazine* 539

Font criticism: Bookman Old Style is a good font, but the italic version seems to be missing here, so the italics are automatically-slanted obliques. In my humble opinion, those are not as good as italics. I'll attach an italic Bookman font to the e-

mail of this LOC so that you'll have one. Of course, I'm not the editor, so this is just a suggestion. (The PDF does have Bookman Old Style /Bold/ Italic, so for an example of what I mean, go to the top of page 3 and look at the "e" in the word "Cover" versus the "e" in the word "Assignment.")

*[ I appreciate your suggestion, but frankly my top priority with BCSFazine, apart from content. Is speed of manufacture, as it were. This is why no attempt to place illustrations within the text, for example. So, even an extra click to chose a different font is not something I want to do except where necessary. All part of my idiosyncratic approach to editing this clubzine. ]*

"Editorial: The God-Editor Speaks!": "It used to be, in order to talk to people, you had to meet them in person [...] usually in a pub or a restaurant, or at a party thrown by someone in their home. Now? Goonline." I miss chat rooms. That was when you could truly go online and find real-time conversations like the ones in the real world. Better than the real world, in fact, because in a text-only environment, you can compose your thoughts before sending them, no-one can interrupt you in mid-sentence, and no-one can judge you on your age, weight, gender, attractiveness, or voice. So I recently gave IRC another try, even going as far as to look up what the most-populated IRC server is and going to the most-populated room on that server, and still, it was a vast wasteland. There were a hundred people in that room, all silent. I even tried to start the conversation by saying "Is anyone here?" but nobody answered.

*[ Ah, so the web is more of a wasteland than I had thought, it seems. ]*

One recent development is society's widespread use of the application Zoom to hold meetings and socialise over the Internet without risking coronavirus contamination. And one nice thing about Zoom is that if you don't have a camera or microphone for your computer, you can still participate by clicking "Chat" and typing text into a side panel. Meanwhile, you can still see and hear the people who do have cameras and microphones. Joe Devoy, Michael "Fruvous" Bertrand, Julian Castle and I recently tried watching an episode of /Columbo/ (1971–2003) together, they in their apartment watching it on DVD, and me at my parents' house watching it from a PVR recording from cable TV. Using Zoom, we chatted as we watched it. I could hear their copy playing through my computer's audio, so with the occasional pause on their end or my end we were able to keep the videos synchronised so we were seeing the same thing at the same time. It was easier than what I remember of trying to do RiffTrax with a good copy of the movie playing on the VCR, the RiffTrax commentary track playing on the computer, and "Disembaudio," a robot voice in the commentary that would occasionally speak lines from the movie so you could check if you were still synchronised. That proved to be unwieldy and infeasible.

We could try holding FRED on Zoom. This would allow BCSFAns from the

“asteroid belt” and “Kuiper Belt” zones to attend FRED! Remember when Spider Robinson offered to attend VCON via video? The technology is finally easy enough to use. Those without a camera or microphone, like me, could use the text chat. FREDgoers could submit trivia questions by private message to Fruvous or me.

*[ Interesting possibilities you raise. I'm becoming more and more interested in trying out Zoom, though I hear it has poor security and is easily hijacked, though I suppose that would make FRED even more interesting. Hmm .... ]*

“Odds and Sods About This Zine”: “Trades Policy”: “[...] hardcopy zines would arrive in the mail box and nobody but nobody was interested in borrowing them to read when I brought them to meetings.” I liked to read /Opuntia/ when Garth Spencer brought trades to meetings, and Julian liked to read /The Voyageur/ and other zines when I brought them. (/Opuntia/ has also gone to PDF-only, or to borrow an expression from /Opuntia/ editor Dale Speirs, another node disappears from the Papernet.)

“Void Breather Bombast”: “Them Zany Physicists!”: “[...] ‘bubbles of nothing’ that eat spacetime.” Langoliers!

“More ‘Earths’ than people on Earth!”: “You know what this means, don’t you?” Now we don’t have to worry about the environment!

“Fame!” by Taral Wayne: It does seem as though life goes downhill, and the past was always a simpler, more innocent time. There has to be a better way for me to look at it. I don’t know Taral in person, but I like his art. Despite having sensitive hearing, I usually can’t make out song lyrics either—a combination of the accompaniment obscuring the vocals, the singers not enunciating (sometimes actively slurring their words as though they’re ashamed of the lyrics and don’t want us to know what they are), and my preferred focus being on the music rather than the words. Maybe also a little middle-age hearing loss, although I still find I’m still very sensitive to loudness, so if I’m losing my hearing, it’s the worst of both worlds. I can’t make out what people are saying, but the world isn’t getting quieter! A comedian at my favourite open mike has a joke about old people wanting young people to turn their music down, and young people wanting old people to turn their TVs down.

*[ Actually, it's a myth that olden times were simpler. If you study history closely enough you'll find each and every period was extraordinarily complex and as full of bastards as modern times. For instance, in Classical Athens summer was the occasion for the equivalent of bankers, brokers, investors and shipping agents to work together to ensure profitable voyages for merchant ships. In winter, when the weather was too dangerous for sailing and all the ships were laid up on slips, all these characters spent their time suing each other over their financial shenanigans. It's just that, in terms of living memory past, as time goes by people tend to telescope the good times together and forget the bad, so their past seems quite pleasant in their memory.*



*Mind, age does inevitably bring physical and mental deterioration. But for an introvert like me, whose idea of a great time is to read and write, aging is no big deal, so far. Thomas Edison mentioned he rather enjoyed going deaf because it enabled him to concentrate better. Mind you, he was decidedly an anti-social type from the get go, so I'm not presenting him as a role model. But in this case I get what he means. ]*

“Steve Stiles Art Portfolio”: Steve has a very likeable art style. I don’t get what is happening in “Events in the Space Program They Never Told Us About.” Is the Space Shuttle about to explode on the launch pad? Are the guys dressed like the Golden Age Flash chasing the astronaut because they’re mad at him?

*[ Yes, I believe the basic idea is that he was scared of the damn thing. I believe this was drawn way before the Challenger blew up on lift-off though, so the humour was not meant to be morbid or dark. Must admit I never viewed the guys chasing him as anything other than standard pad assistants. Your interpretation throws a whole new light on the illustration. Fleeing the reality of the dangers of space travel as opposed to the glorious fictional dream? Something like that? ]*

“Random Musings” by Robert J. Sawyer: “Why are so many in fandom not just clueless but nasty?” I sometimes have dark thoughts about the default nature of humanity but it’s too misanthropic and cynical to go into here. Chase Masterson has the right idea.

“Ballot-box stuffing” sounds like a delicious combination of bread crumbs, spices, and slips of paper.

*Star Trek* has indeed been getting less optimistic, as has science fiction generally. It’s possible that with the way the world is going, a utopian future is no longer believable, or it hurts too much to suspend disbelief in such a world and then come back to reality. In the 1980s, we still thought humanity had a future and science would march on forever. Even in something dystopian like cyberpunk, there was still the assumption that the future would be high-tech and civilised. Now even that doesn’t seem certain.

“Tonight’s Movie: Spaceballs” by Michael Bertrand: *Spaceballs* (1987) is easily my favourite Mel Brooks movie too, and by a wide margin even between it and my second-favourite, *High Anxiety* (1977). *Blazing Saddles* (1974) and *History of the World, Part I* (1981) are a distant third and fourth, despite some brilliant moments. I’ve struggled with the question of why the post-*Spaceballs* era, including *Life Stinks* (1991), *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993), and *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1995) was so bad. Why such a sharp and sudden drop-off in quality? What was the missing ingredient? One theory is that while *Spaceballs* is a parody of many different SF movies, *Robin Hood* and *Dracula* only covered one subject each. That can’t be the only factor, though. (Also, for what it’s worth, *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* has grown on me a little over the years.)

*[ My all-time favourite Mel Brooks movie is “Young Frankenstein” (1974), mainly because it’s mostly a spoof of “Son of Frankenstein” (1939), a film I imprinted on as a kid when I saw it on TV’s Shock Theatre. A close second is his film “The Producers” (1968). Gene Wilder is quite good, but the stand-out performance is that of Zero Mostel, who remains wildly funny. A least I think so. The recent remake was pretty good, but Mostel could chew the scenery more voraciously than anyone else whenever he decided to go over-the-top. Always admired him. ]*

There’s one other layer to the “raspberry” scene that adds to its genius: the camera slowly pushes in on Dark Helmet as he says it, and Colonel Sandurz has to hustle to get out of the camera’s way. His eyes go wide as he steps back. It’s a nice touch.

When Barf says the line “I’m my own best friend,” he sounds wistful, as though he finds it slightly sad.

In the TV version of *Spaceballs* that I have on tape, the “Asshole” scene isn’t missing; it’s just reworded so that the Assholes are called Morons instead. It’s not quite as funny, even though the essential joke mechanism is the same. Also, when Dark Helmet says “Keep firing, Assholes!” instead of redubbing it to “Keep firing, Morons!” they truncate it to just “Keep firing—!”

I agree about Rick Moranis doing the Jamaican accent on the line “What’s with you, man?” Relatedly, he does a vaguely Asian accent on the words “to ours” in the line “You are now our prisoner, and will be held hostage until such time as all of the air is transferred from your planet ... to ours.”

In the TV version of *Spaceballs* that I have, the entire “fat bearded bitch” line is cut and we just see Dark Helmet shouting incoherently through the escape pod window.

As a child in the 1980s I was a fan of Jim J. Bullock’s character Monroe Ficus on *Too Close for Comfort* (1980) and yet when I saw *Spaceballs* in theatres I don’t think I realised that was him as Prince Valium.

“The Light-Hearted Vituperator and Jolly Reviler” by Stan G. Hyde: Part of getting older is seeing the properties you loved as a child get remade, remastered, and reversioned, so that they’re not the same anymore. This can be very painful and can lead to lashing out. I went through that phase in my 20s. Eventually I had to draw the line and decide that certain remakes and adaptations “don’t exist” (just for me personally) and to let go of the idea that any of these things will ever be “done right.” I’ve been less stressed out, so I think it worked. I’ve got my original versions archived and I can enjoy them whenever I want. If a new version of something gets made and it’s not bad, it’s a pleasant surprise. I have zero expectations and that seems to be better for my health.

*[ I enjoy seeing remastered versions of films as good or better than what was originally visible in the theatre. Love looking at all the details. Often good for subtleties in the acting not visible on old style TV screens, too. And I don’t mind*

*enhanced special effects. I have both versions of all Star Trek episodes, so it's nice to be able to chose which version I feel like watching. On the other hand, dramatically monkeying around with the script, as in the "Who shot first" sequence in Star Wars, definitely strikes me as a step too far. The day may not be far off when classic films are totally restructured, possibly with new CGI actors replacing the genuine actors deemed politically incorrect, in order to meet the political standards of the day. For the moment, the bulk of the remastering seems dedicated to restoring films as close to their original pristine condition as possible. That I'm happy with. The future ... well, the future isn't what it used to be. ]*

"It Is What It Is, Mansplaining the State of Fandom" by Garth Spencer: In theory, if fandom keeps expanding, each subfandom will eventually be the same size as the original fandom. So, you could have as many fanzine fans in 2020 as there were fans in general in 1970. In practice, I don't see much socialising going on. Or, to be more precise, there's social media, but it's a diffuse haze, where conversations get lost in the shuffle, and there's no sustained, concentrated socialising.

*[ Hoping BCSFAzine will constitute a form of socializing for the Greater BCSFA. Could be just a pipe dream. Time will provide an answer one way or the other. ]*

"Our Thirteen Days in the USA, to Corflu in Texas in the Time of Coronavirus" by Murray Moore: My maternal grandmother lived through the great toilet paper shortage of 1973, the one Johnny Carson allegedly caused with some jokes on /The Tonight Show/. She never forgot what it was like. She started gradually saving up toilet paper until she had a closet half-filled with it, just in case. Inspired by her, I've kept a few extra packages of toilet paper in my own closet since the 1990s. I haven't had to use them yet, but knowing they're there has been a big comfort during this time. I also saved all the extra napkins I got at restaurants. Sometimes it's good to be a pack rat!

"Crysanthemum in the Mediterranean" by Ed Beauregard: I didn't have the systemising intelligence to understand the gameplay, but I enjoyed the historical background and motivations of the groups. I can also see how historical wargaming leads naturally to something like /BattleTech/ and how such gaming experience helped the authors write novels for it.

"Ook! Ook! Slobber! Drool! (Letters of Comment)": Thanks to Garth Spencer, Robert Sawyer, Lloyd Penney, John Purcell for the kind words of acknowledgement! And kudos to Graeme for taking on the task!

*[ And thank your for your letter! It constitutes an article in itself and offers much to think about. I hope it serves as an inspiration to others such that they will write in on a regular basis. Would love to find out what other readers think of this experiment. Looking forward to your next LoC. Cheers! – The Graeme ]*

## AFTERWORDS

Arrgh! A full page to fill. Does anybody read this far? Will anybody read this page? Maybe not. Despite presumably having plenty of time to kill under Covid-19 lockdown, have people's habits really changed?

By that I mean the popular consensus of modern pundits appears to imply no one has any time to read anything nowadays. Supposedly people have the attention span of Mayflies. Presumably the best I can hope for is that readers will skip through the pages, stopping to read only what appears interesting. This is why so much visual media is so jumpy. The current wisdom is that viewers will tolerate scenes for only about ten seconds and grow bored with anything longer. Thus the Flash! Flash! Flash! nature of many films, TV shows and, most annoyingly, documentaries. What the hell is the point of watching something if you're not allowed to look at it? If I want to experience a psychedelic light show I'll rely on my memories of the 1960s thank you very much.

BCSFazine is designed for people who like to read. Screw pizzazz, I offer content worth reading. At least, that's the idea. It is why I put emphasis on material that is entertaining, or at least interesting, which to me amounts to the same thing. Of course, what I consider interesting others may not. In which case, bugger off! Find a zine more to your taste. Not going to compromise mine.

Fact is I don't think my taste is so bizarre as to render me uniquely unique. I figure a lifetime of eclectic interest in SF fandom, illustration, movies, art, literature, gaming, conventioning and everything else to do with science fiction gives me an overall perspective that resonates with quite a few fen.

Because of this I'm anticipating a growing number of fen will enjoy reading BCSFazine and become accustomed to looking forward to the next issue. Even better, become eager to contribute to the next issue. It may be pure fantasy on my part, but a rather harmless one methinks, and maybe potentially productive.

I will draw the line at certain things. I'm extremely reluctant to print anything that will revive old fan feuds or start new ones. I have no intention of offering a forum for trolls. That's what the web is for.

And I'd rather not publish what I call "dead facts." Which is to say, mere facts stated for the record yet devoid of personal interpretation. If you are going to write about something I want to know what you think its significance is, what it means, how it affects the genre, what its influence is, whether it is any damn good or not, what lessons it offers, and mainly, why you felt compelled to write about it.

I'm not out to print a list of lists. I want a compilation of opinions and viewpoints. I want contributors writing about their passions and enthusiasms, unashamedly venturing their opinions through personal epiphanies and realizations, but not at the expense of their fellow fen.

Most of all, I want people to demonstrate why it is so much fun to be a fan!  
That's not too much to ask, is it?

Cheers! The Graeme